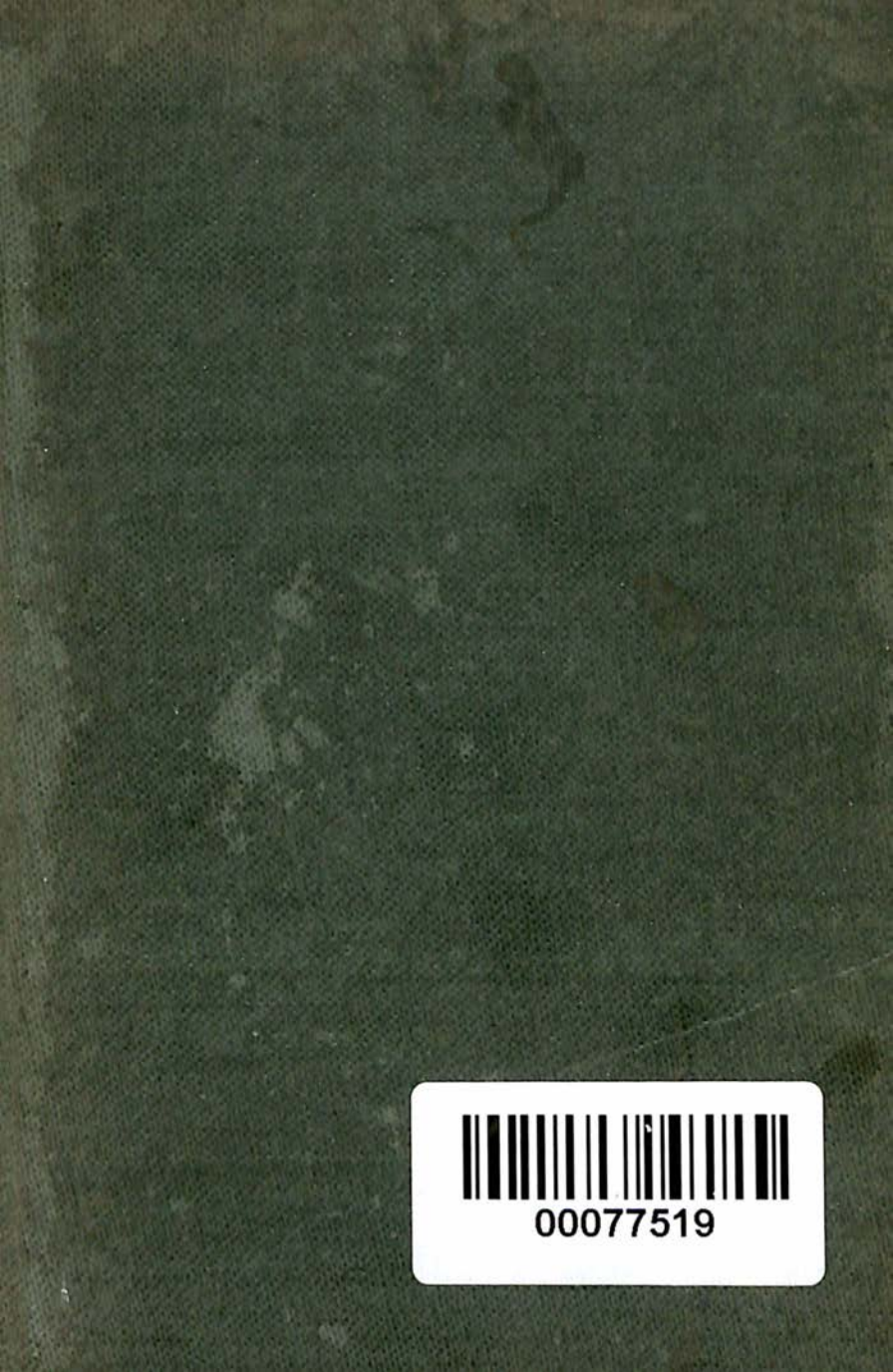
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PROBATION.

A Novel.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF 'THE FIRST VIOLIN.'

'Life let us cherish!'

77519

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,
Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen.
1879.

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PROBATION.

BOOK I.—*Continued.*

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TWO RADICALS.

MRS. MALLORY came into her drawing-room twenty minutes before the dinner-hour, and found her son already there, alone, already dressed, and stretched, in an attitude of extreme laziness, in an arm-chair by the fire.

There was likeness between the mother and son—strong likeness; and there was also, what most people forget in comparing

relations with one another, strong unlikeness. Mrs. Mallory was an elegant-looking, and a young-looking woman. She had an impassive, pale face, with thin lips and a high nose; pale, flaxen hair, without a grey streak in its glossy abundance; and the elegant trifle of lace and feathers which she wore upon it made her look still younger and handsomer. She was dressed in pale lavender silk and white lace, and she looked a very handsome, prosperous person, as she came in, casting a glance at Sebastian—a sharp, keen, calculating glance. Mrs. Mallory loved power, and had long exercised it; she did not realise that her son had grown from a boy into a man since she had known him. She had the lowest possible opinion of the natural penetration of men; and circumstances had fostered that impression. There is a great deal in having once lived for a term of years in close intercourse with a person very decidedly one's inferior in intellect, as in the case of Mrs. Mallory and her

late husband. There is nothing like it for giving one an overweening idea of one's own capacities, and for fostering an attitude of contemptuous tolerance towards the opinions of every one else. Mrs. Mallory's experience of her husband had entailed, as one of its indirect sequences, that she was completely deceived now by the lazy, languid manner of her son. In this most agreeable of convictions, that of mental supremacy over the rest of the company, let her tranquilly abide, until her hour of disillusion arrives.

'Mother, it is too absurd that I should have to go about representing myself as your son! Couldn't you pass as my sister?'

'Nonsense! Where is your friend?'

'Dressing, I suppose. He was greatly excited at hearing that a young lady was expected to dinner.'

Mrs. Speneeley had some remarks to make *à propos* of the young lady, but she deferred them for a moment, in order to inquire:

'What have you been doing all day?'

And she placed herself in an easy-chair opposite to his, and held a feathery screen between her face and the fire.

'I have been, like a good little boy, attending to my lessons,' said her son lazily.

'Ah, don't speak in parables! I have forgotten how. In this dreadful place every one says the most disagreeable things they can think of, in the most disagreeable way they can think of, and then call it being honest and candid. And if you can contrive to drop a few h's, and speak in a broad Lancashire dialect at the same time, you are thought very honest and candid indeed. I detest the place!'

'Do you really, mother? I wonder you have remained here so long.'

'I have tried to do my duty, Sebastian, to you and your property. A woman must make up her mind to sacrifice herself—a mother above all others.'

'I am infinitely obliged to you, mother,

but I trust that now you will have a long and complete rest. I am going to learn my business——'

'Very proper, but I think it will take you some time. With your habits I am afraid you will find it a frightful bore.'

'Do you know my habits, mother?' he inquired in the very quietest of voices.

Mrs. Mallory looked at him in some surprise. As a matter of fact, she did not know his habits in the very least. But, looking at him as he lounged in his easy-chair, with the newspaper across his knees, she said within herself, and prided herself upon her discernment:

'His father all over: weak and idle, though he has more surface quickness. I don't think I shall have much trouble with him.'

'At least I know, dear, that your habits have not been those of Thanshope business men. But I suppose your first object will be to go over the works and see your people?'

'I have been over the works, and have seen my people, and spoken to them.'

'When—why did you not tell me?' she asked vivaciously, and with no little vexation. 'You should not be so impetuous, Sebastian.'

He laughed.

'The first time I was ever accused of impetuousness. It shows indeed that you don't know my habits.'

This was annoying, though it was impossible to complain about it.

'These people will not bear to be treated unceremoniously, though they are such bears themselves.'

'I am not aware that I did treat them unceremoniously.'

'What did you say to them?' she asked, curiosity getting the better of vexation. 'I wish you had not been so hasty. A speech of that kind requires both consideration and careful management. I hope you did not commit yourself. They are such frightful

people for taking up one's most innocent remarks and construing them into something quite different from what one intended.'

Mrs. Mallory spoke feelingly, as if from experience.

'Are they? Well, I don't know that I committed myself to anything from which I should wish to back out later. Indeed, I am not a fellow who is given to backing out of his promises—but then I make so few,' he added thoughtfully. 'I simply told them I was afraid there were bad times coming, and that we must stand by each other in them. And I said a few words on politics.'

'My dear boy! how foolish! Excuse me, but it was. They are rabid Radicals, and have a prejudice against you already—one of their horrid, narrow-minded prejudices, and to mention that you were a Conservative would certainly not improve the situation.'

Sebastian looked a little surprised.

'How odd it is! Why should I tell them

I was a Conservative when I am a Radical? I spoke the truth, of course.'

Not Mrs. Transome herself could have been more horrified at Harold's declaration of his views than was Mrs. Mallory at this avowal by her son. She forgot to shade that complexion which was not as the complexions of other women of six and forty. She laid her screen down, sat bolt upright, without the pretence of any amiability in her expression, and said sharply:

'You ought to be ashamed of yourself!'

'I am truly sorry that I cannot oblige you by feeling so.'

'You have no respect for your father, or your grandfather—for any of your forefathers,' said she sullenly. 'Every man here who can boast of a grandfather, much more a man of good old family like yours, ought to be a Conservative out of pure self-respect. No! You have no respect for your ancestors, or for yourself.'

'*Mon Dieu!* I think I have as much re-

spect for them as they deserve. Do you think ancestors are really of much use? But at least, I have more respect for their memories than to imagine that they would wish me simply to sit down and hobnob with the first opinions that happened to be offered to me. Since I have inherited my name and my tendencies of mind from them, I must also have inherited my brains and my reasoning powers from them. I have an inquiring mind, a thing, my dear mother, which is not spontaneously generated, but developed.'

'That is atheism, Sebastian—blasphemy. I won't allow it.'

'But you will allow me to explain my opinions to you, I am sure. That is always better, and saves so many misunderstandings.'

'I see without explanation that you are a renegade to your fathers, and have degraded yourself to the level of these horrid, insolent Radicals; yes, to the level of these grasping, dirty, presuming workpeople. I hate them,

Sebastian: I cannot tell you how I hate all Radicals. How can you refuse any of the demands of these odious people now, professing, as you do, their own opinions?'

'I don't know what their opinions may be, I am sure. Probably not at all the same as mine. But I was going to mention that, in my quite early youth, I once read a little sentence which made a deep impression upon my mind; it ran thus: "Those who believe that heaven is what earth has been—a monopoly in the hands of a favoured few, would do well to reconsider their opinion; if they find that it came from their priest or their grandmother, they could not do better than reject it."'

'I call that impiety,' said she, her lips tightening.

'Allow me to finish,' said he courteously. 'I read between the lines of that little remark, and applied the principle contained in it to a great many other things beside

those mentioned in the text; and the result of my continued use of that principle as a test of institutions, opinions, and customs has been that I am a Radical.'

'It is an odious and an impious principle,' said Mrs. Mallory, with cold and bitter anger in her voice, 'and it is a principle to which I will never give any countenance.'

The shock had been not a small one of finding that Sebastian called himself by the name she hated, as the formula of the sum of the opinions of Thanshope—Radical. But a yet greater shock was that of finding, that though he seemed so soft and pliable, spoke so indifferently, smiled so languidly, yet that she could no more bend him, nor apparently impress him, than she could stem the incoming tide of the ocean.

Sebastian had risen, and was standing by the mantelpiece. Mrs. Mallory glanced at him once, sideways, and caught his eye. That was annoying in itself: it vexed and angered her because he was smiling.

'I am sorry you don't like it, mother,' he said quite pleasantly and cheerfully, but not in the least apologetically; 'and yet, do you know, considering the letters you have had from me, and my perfect frankness as to the society I have most sought and enjoyed, I think you might have been prepared for it, even if I never explicitly stated my convictions.'

This was also true. He had a most annoying way of being in the right.

'Convictions? Oh, I dislike that talk about convictions. When people want to annoy their best friends, they call their conduct the result of convictions.'

'The impertinence of circumstances is certainly very great sometimes,' assented Sebastian, leaning against the mantelpiece, and she, as she tapped her foot impatiently upon the floor, would hardly have been flattered to find that he was thinking:

'I must let her rail against it until it begins to be tiresome—perhaps she may see the

wisdom of stopping before then. I suppose one must make allowances for the disappointment of a woman whose prejudices (or convictions?) have been offended; but it would be wasting words to reason with her about it, and soon, I suppose, she will learn to accept the circumstance and make the best of it.'

He had no wish or intention of being disrespectful. Simply, he had 'beaten his music out' with more difficulty than any one knew, save himself, and was mildly surprised to find that the resulting harmony, which sounded not ill in his own ears, should cause his mother such shuddering, should fall so discordantly upon her perceptions. He had no more idea of interrupting the flow of that harmony than he had of sharing his ample estate with all the paupers in Thanshope.

Fortunately, at this juncture, Hugo came into the room, his odd, original young face looking still more peculiar in contrast with his careful evening dress, and before many

words had been exchanged, 'Miss Spenceley' was announced.

Sebastian turned, with the story of Frederick Spenceley and his already conceived contempt for him strong in his mind, to confront Frederick Spenceley's sister. His glance softened as it fell upon the girl advancing towards his mother.

Had he wandered through all the cities of Europe and seen their lovely women, in order to come home and find in a provincial manufacturing town, a daughter of the people more beautiful than any of them?

'Helena, my love, let me introduce my son, who has arrived sooner than I expected. Sebastian, Miss Spenceley.'

A profound bow on his part, and a rather careless, not very sophisticated inclination of her beautiful head on hers, was the result of these phrases of politeness:

'My son's friend, Mr. von Birkenau,' was then introduced, and received the same notice exactly, a notice graceful and even

dignified, because she could not help all her movements being graceful and dignified.

'Like my daughter,' Mrs. Mallory had said, and as she spoke to Helena Spenceley, her voice assuredly took a tender accent; she glanced over the young lady's costly dress and smoothed down a lace ruffle with the affectionate familiarity of a very intimate friend or much-loved relative.

Miss Spenceley remained standing on the hearthrug, talking to Mrs. Mallory—a lovely, noble figure, tall, slim, and shapely, with the exquisite elasticity of perfect health in every one.

'Splendid!' said Sebastian, in his own mind; and splendid expressed her appearance and her character both. From her great dark, soft eyes, her dusky hair, in its delicate unruly little rings and tendrils, her ripe red lips, set in a delicious curve of mirth, frankness, and wilfulness, down to her rich dress and sparkling rings, she was all splendid, without being in the least vulgar.

'Dear child, what a long time it is since I saw you!' said Mrs. Mallory.

'Yes. I have been busy. How nice this fire is, Mrs. Mallory. I do believe we have not had one at our house yet. Perhaps it is lighted on your behalf?' she added, turning to Sebastian with a somewhat malicious smile.

'Mine? Not so far as I am aware. What makes you think so?'

'You have been living in warm countries lately, and Thanshope is not a warm place, but one of those towns where we have to use a lot of coals to make up for the want of sunshine!'

'Yes, indeed!' said Mrs. Mallory, shivering.

'I have not had time to miss the sunshine, or to enjoy it if there had been any, since I came,' said Sebastian, his glance dwelling almost involuntarily upon her as she stood there, her eyes flashing back the firelight, and looking herself (he thought) like some bright, living flame, or some tropical flower.

He could not understand her. There was nothing vulgar about her; her voice was pleasant and, though distinctly northern in its clear accent, was not in the least uneducated in its pronunciation of words; she had ease, grace, self-possession of carriage; apparently she was devoid altogether of self-consciousness; all of which things were surely signs of good breeding; and yet she was not in the least like the many well-bred girls whom he had met in society up and down the world—in Paris, Vienna, Berlin, and other places. He wondered what she could talk about, and whether she talked well.

Dinner was announced, and he led her into the dining-room. Hugo von Birkenau was talking with much animation to Mrs. Mallory, as was his wont, though she did not appear to find him a very interesting companion.

Helena Spenceley, suddenly turning to Sebastian, said:

'I know quite well where you have been. I have followed your course with the greatest interest. Mrs. Mallory used always to tell me where you went, and sometimes read me bits of your letters.'

'Did she? I wish I had known.'

'Do you? Why?' she asked, looking at him with a certain bright attentiveness, and waiting with evident interest for his answer.

Certainly she was not like other girls. Another girl would have known directly that he meant a kind of vague compliment by his aimless phrase; but she said 'Why?'

'If I had known, perhaps I might have written rather more carefully-considered epistles to my mother,' he said, and felt that it was, and sounded, a lame reply.

'That would have been a pity, for the sake of a person you had never seen and did not know,' she said, the smile fading from her face.

Sebastian felt he had made a bad begin-

ning. It began to be rather dreadful, when she went on quite seriously :

'Do you mean that if you had thought your letters were read aloud you would have made them into set compositions to please an audience ?'

'I think it is a matter of no importance whatever. Letter-writing is not my *forte*. I am too lazy.'

'Oh, they were very interesting letters,' said Helena naïvely. 'But how can you talk about being lazy ! If only I had had such chances !' She shook her head.

'I should think you had the chance of doing whatever you pleased,' he said, smiling.

Helena did not respond to the smile. Her face, intensely expressive, darkened visibly. Her eyes sank.

'No,' said she coldly. 'You are quite mistaken. Whatever pleasures and enjoyments I have had in my life have been procured for me by the kindness of Mrs. Mallory. She has been so good to me.' She

looked at him with eyes tragic in the earnestness of their expression.

Sebastian, glancing down the table, saw that Hugo's eyes were fixed upon her in a perfect trance of admiration.

'Then you have never been abroad?' said he.

'I—no! I have been nowhere except to London once or twice—oh, and to Brighton with Mrs. Mallory. I don't want to go anywhere.'

'You are such a home-bird?'

He saw immediately that he had asked an unfortunate question. The blood rushed over her face as she replied, again coldly:

'Oh no! I think all that stuff about "home, sweet home," and that, is the most wearisome nonsense imaginable. I hate it. . . . Did you study the position of women at all, when you were abroad?'

Sebastian looked at her. She was perfectly grave, serious, and judicial. The 'Woman Question' had not been forced so

far to the front in 1861 as in 1878, and Sebastian was proportionately surprised to hear that question from so young, rich, and beautiful a woman as Helena Spenceley.

'I'm afraid I was rather remiss in that respect. But one sees their position without studying it, I think.'

'And what do you think about it? Is it what it ought to be? But that is a foolish question. It is not what it ought to be anywhere. It never will be what it ought to be, until women themselves rise and refuse any longer to submit to their own degradation. Don't you think so?'

'Really, I am afraid I have not thought much at all upon the question.'

'I suppose the idea has not yet penetrated to France and Germany. It will have to come, though, sooner or later. The German woman, for instance—is she in bonds or emancipated?'

'As how?'

'Is the German woman the slave of the

German man, or has she a position of her own?'

A malign spirit took possession of Sebastian. Mrs. Mallory and Hugo were both listening to the discussion, Mrs. Mallory with a shade of anxiety on her face. Sebastian, after a pause, as if he were profoundly considering the question, said:

'I should say that she combined both those conditions—that she was very decidedly the slave of the German man, and at the same time had a distinct position of her own.'

'Really! I wish I had brought my note-book. Pray explain!'

'The German woman's thoughts are, if I may use such an expression, directed man-wards, *mann* being, you know, her word for husband. Her thoughts, then, are directed *mann*-wards from her earliest youth—from the time when she begins to go to school. . .'

'Horrible!' said Helena, her eyes fixed in grave earnest upon his face, so that his

gravity was sorely tried. 'Horrible! Well?'

'I don't know how much or how little true the report may be about her beginning in early youth to prepare her trousseau.'

'Disgusting!'

'But she hears all around her and all her life long conversations on the subject of matrimony.'

'The end and aim of her existence, poor thing!' said Helena, with a pitying smile. 'Go on! You have studied the subject almost unconsciously, as every thinking man must.'

'If she reaches the age of one-and-twenty, unmarried, she begins to wonder what the reason can be of such a thing, and her friends, too, begin to speculate about it . . .'

'Naturally!' said Helena, her eyes flashing and her colour rising, while Hugo looked preternaturally solemn, except for a gleam in the depths of his eyes, and Mrs. Mallory's face wore a puzzled expression. 'Naturally

—she is sold, disposed of before her reasoning powers are developed. It is very deplorable. Well?'

'But very generally she is married at or before that age, and then——'

'And *then?*' echoed Helena, waving away the butler's offer of wine, and leaning eagerly towards Sebastian. 'And then—what is her life afterwards, Mr. Mallory? Tell me that!'

'A long course of bondage to husband, children, domestic affairs, and social exactions.'

'Hideous!' murmured Helena. 'What a sad, sad fate! Did you not burn with indignation every time you witnessed it?'

'I—I——'

'Ah! you did, I know, or you could not have described it so graphically. And now you will consider the subject, I don't doubt, and you will see it in its true light. But you said the German women had also a distinct position of their own. How do you account for that?'

'They have. The very fact of their bondage gives them a sort of distinguishing rank. They have been accustomed to it for so long, that now they glory in it. If you were to attempt to inspire them with your enlightened notions, they would probably scoff at you; you would appear as dark to them as they to you.'

Helena looked at him with such intense earnestness and expressiveness, that Sebastian began to feel somewhat embarrassed.

'What an odd girl she is!' he thought. 'And how, in Heaven's name, shall I get out of this mess that I have got into? I can't let her go without offering some explanation.'

'You grieve me,' said Helena, in a sorrowful voice. 'I had no idea it was so bad as that.'

Here Mrs. Mallory rose, in dignified though perplexed silence, and they all went into the drawing-room.

Arrived there, Sebastian, as in duty bound, asked Helena to play.

'I don't play at all,' said she. 'I can't waste my time upon practising.'

'*Waste* your time upon music?' he asked, wondering whether that were one of the strong-minded female ideas too.

'I have not the power of interpreting music; it would be vanity and vexation. So I never try. I can just accompany myself in one or two little songs; that is all.'

'Then you will gratify us by singing one of the said little songs, I am sure.'

Helena went to the piano, sat down, and began to play an introduction. Sebastian looked at Hugo, with ever so slight a shrug, and they waited. It was 'Kathleen Mavourneen.' But the faces of the two critics changed gradually from an expression of painful doubt and suspense, to pleased surprise, pleasure, and a broad smile of delight. A pure, strong, fresh, sweet soprano voice rang out. There was no attempt at airs and

graces; the severest simplicity and the most unaffected tenderness sounded in every one of the true, clear notes.

Mrs. Mallory watched her son covertly, but intently, and saw that Helena's music had power to move him. The languor disappeared from his expression; his head was raised, and his lips parted. Song and songstress engrossed his attention.

Mrs. Mallory's countenance gradually cleared.

As Helena finished, both Hugo and Sebastian sprang forward, with thanks and entreaties for something else.

She paused a moment, and then sang:

"'Since first I saw your face, I resolved
To honour and renown ye;
If now I be disdained, I wish
My heart had never known ye!

"'What! I that loved, and you that liked,
Shall *we* begin to wrangle?
No, no, no, my heart is fast,
And cannot disentangle.

'"The sun, whose beams most glorious are,
Rejecteth no beholder;
And your sweet beauty, past compare,
Makes my poor eyes the bolder.

'"Where beauty moves, and wit delights,
And ties of kindness bind me,
There, oh! there, where'er I go,
I leave my heart behind me."'

It is a sweet, tender, quaint old song, and Helena sang it almost perfectly. She rose when she had finished, and, looking at Hugo, asked him if he did not play.

'Yes,' said the boy, flushing; 'but after your voice——'

'Don't refuse, Hugo,' put in Sebastian.

And Hugo seated himself and began to play German music—deep, strange, and expressive, *con amore*.

'But he is a musician—he must be!' said Helena, turning, with wide-open eyes, to Sebastian.

'Most certainly he is. I believe he has it in him to make a great name as a composer.'

'How delightful to have a talent, a genius,

that gives pleasure to yourself and every one else! Is he a very great friend of yours?'

'Yes; he is my ward. I have been his guardian now for four years.'

'Ah! if he can compose, he has a life before him—a career!' sighed Helena; and her eyes looked dreamingly and longingly before her.

Sebastian felt strangely attracted to the girl, but as yet he felt he knew her too little to know whether he should even like her. The explanation he had to make would serve to bring out some fresh point in her character.

Mrs. Mallory was knitting fleecy-white wool by the fireside, and seemed able to give up Helena's society on this occasion. Hugo's fingers wandered on in one melody after another—melodies like those which Adrienne Blisset's fingers most readily wove.

Helena herself gave Sebastian the opportunity he wished for.

'About the German women and their position?' she began.

He laughed a little.

'I had no idea you were so much in earnest,' said he. 'It was a joke.'

'A joke!'

She turned to him in amaze.

'In this way. What I said was quite true—that *is* the position of the German women; but—but—I thought you would see it—isn't it the position of all civilised women? Are not Englishwomen in the same case? I am sure I think so. I don't see how any woman who marries can expect anything else.'

The colour rushed in an angry flood over her cheek, and brow, and throat, as she realised that he had been politely making merriment of the subject, and that the very point of the joke lay in her having taken it all as solemn, thoughtful earnest.

'You were making fun of me and of the cause: that was very polite of you!' she said, her eyes flashing upon him in anger.

'I am very sorry,' he said, with a provoking smile. 'I was only describing the position of women in general in a picturesque manner. It depends upon the feelings of the arguer as to the colouring he gives to his descriptions.'

'I see,' said Helena, 'you are just like any other selfish, unthinking man—not in earnest. But I am! I think that cause is worthy the devotion of a woman's life; and it is what I intend to devote my life to.'

'Don't!' said Sebastian involuntarily.

But Helena had been roused to real anger.

'Compliments and pretty phrases are all we ever get from men on that subject,' she said. 'All my life I have been sure it was women alone who must work their own emancipation; and after what you have said to-night, I am doubly sure of it. Oh! it is horrible to think that a woman is not even allowed to have a serious thought upon her own condition; or if she says she has to a

man, he laughs at her! There is one consolation—the laugh dishonours him, not her.'

'But, my dear Miss Spenceley, do let me explain. Do you think you really have had any experience in such things? Many most accomplished women think quite differently; the nicest girl I ever knew—I mean the cleverest and best-informed young lady I ever knew—thought very differently.'

'Perhaps that was one reason why you thought her so nice. I am sure she had not been brought up in the school of adversity and experience.'

'Pardon me! She had been brought up in that school alone, and in no other. I fancy she had attended more of its classes than you.'

'I don't see how you can know what school I have attended,' said Helena, the same sudden, cold, sharp look coming into her eyes and over her face. 'And I do not think much of any woman who is indifferent upon that subject.'

'I did not say she was indifferent,' said Sebastian; and Helena, looking at him, saw that he was, in imagination, in some very different place from his mother's drawing-room; perhaps thinking of 'the nicest girl I ever knew.'

'Don't you think,' said he, breaking the angry silence which on her part had supervened, 'that the best way of securing your ends would be for men and women to work together, and——'

'I don't believe in men's help in that matter. They are too thoroughly and naturally selfish ever to give real help in such a cause.'

'Without help you can do nothing,' he said composedly.

'Can we not?' she replied, setting her lips.

'I don't think that any number of women agitating, and making speeches, will answer the purpose. The sort of help I meant is such as would be given by, for instance, hus-

band and wife practically showing how much they had the subject at heart, by working together, and giving in their lives a specimen of their doctrines. It is not a question that will ever be settled by public meetings and petitions. It must grow and evolve, as other social conditions evolve—gradually !'

'Husband and wife !' said Helena, with a sneer—a sneer so bitter and unmistakable as to startle him. 'That is a relation I have put entirely out of my calculations in this matter. I don't believe in the existence of husbands who will give up, and help their wives. I have been able to study the subject remarkably well . . .'

('Mr. Spenceley sits upon Mrs. Spenceley, and the redoubtable Frederick sits upon them all,' thought Sebastian.)

'And the women who wish to improve their condition must put all such foolish ideas aside, and feel, as I do, that they can never be tempted into accepting any such delusory fancies.'

'You feel that?' he said, smiling.

'Yes, I do—to the bottom of my heart.'

Helena spoke with emphasis; her eyes flashing, her cheek flushing. She was very handsome; she was more, splendidly beautiful; 'but how untrained, how unreasonable,' thought Sebastian. 'How different this heat and prejudice from the calm, well-balanced judgment, the clear, philosophical mind, of that other girl, scarcely older than herself. This raging against the weakness and selfishness of men was very short-sighted and rather vulgar, was it not?' All he said, however, was:

'I am glad you feel so independent. It must give you a sense of superiority.'

'I never think about such things. I call it vanity to be always wondering whether you are superior to other people.'

She rose and went across the room to talk to Mrs. Mallory. Very soon, she was discussing the merits of a new knitting-pattern,

just as if no such thing as women's rights had ever been heard of.

When she had gone, and Hugo had retired, after fervently expressing his opinion that she was the loveliest, most fascinating, *schönste, herrlichste* person he had ever seen, Mrs. Mallory introduced her intended remarks upon her favourite. Did not Sebastian think her very lovely? Yes; she certainly was an exquisitely beautiful girl. And intelligent, too? Undoubtedly; but there was a certain sameness about her animation. She seemed to rave a good deal upon one subject.

'If you knew her surroundings, Sebastian, you would not be surprised, I assure you. Such a brother! With her high spirit, and rather strained ideas as to what is honourable and gentlemanly, it must be a bitter cross to her to have that brother constantly disgracing himself in one way or another.'

'Yes, that is true.'

'And her father and mother, too——'

'Ha! what about them?'

'Her mother is a mere cipher—a handsome, helpless, vulgar woman; kind-hearted, but absolutely weak in intellect, and the father is a hard, coarse man who bullies that unfortunate woman in a disgraceful manner. He is proud of his daughter, but in a tyrannical, despotic way. Fortunately for her (I may say it without boasting), he thinks me the best friend she could have, and places no restraint on her visits to me. Otherwise, she has not a congenial companion.'

'The benefit must have been immense to her,' he said. 'I wondered, after all I had heard of her family, how she came to be even so—well-behaved.'

'She ought to marry soon. She would soon calm down if she had a kind husband, whom she loved.'

Sebastian remarked dryly, that she had forcibly expressed her determination to eschew any such relationship.

Mrs. Mallory shook her head, smiling with gentle pity.

'So she may say, but her father has very different views for her. She would be very helpless, cast upon the world, with her beauty, her hasty disposition, and her large fortune.'

'Has she a fortune, then?' he asked with provoking indifference.

'Sebastian, that young, warm-hearted girl, with all her enthusiasms and crotchets, ready to fall into the hands of any adventurer, will have at least a hundred thousand pounds.'

Mrs. Mallory spoke with solemn, impressive manner and tones. She was watching her son, who seemed to view the matter with a seriousness that promised well, for he stood, his hands folded behind him, his eyes fixed upon the carpet, profoundly silent and profoundly grave, till, looking up with a sudden, humorous smile, he said:

'*Ma foi!*' The adventurer who won her, and her hundred thousand pounds, and her frantic ideas on women's rights, and the

execrations of all the other adventurers who had tried, and failed to win her—and her family, who must be most delightful people, I am sure—that adventurer would have driven the very hardest bargain that could well be imagined. I pity him, whoever he may be . . . . Good-night, mother. You must excuse me; I have several things to do to-night. I have my business to learn, you know.'

CHAPTER XV.

'"Do, so," said Socrates; "here is room by me."

'"Oh, Jupiter!" exclaimed Alkibiades, "what I endure from that man! He thinks to subdue every way."'

IN a week from that time the master's face was beginning to be familiar to his work-people; and his business and its details were beginning to be a little less strange to him. Whatever Sebastian thought, felt, or endured, in the change so complete and entire, of habits, customs, and surroundings—and the contrast and the effort to grow accustomed to it must have been pretty severe at times—he said nothing—made absolutely no remark, but quietly 'went at it,' with a cool, calm, compre-

hensive energy which amazed Wilson and the other secondary officials, and delighted little Mr. Sutcliffe.

It seemed as if, from the moment in which the young man had entered the place, work had walked up to him, ready to his hand, and that hand had grappled with it, and that head had bent itself to the understanding of it, without thought, or intention of ever turning back, until the task were accomplished. His place was ready for him, and he stepped into it. He had a tenacious memory; he was rather fond of saying that it was the only mental advantage he possessed. He was a very quiet, undemonstrative person—never paraded any likes or dislikes: at the end of a week, his mother was amazed and angry to find, that though he had so completely worsted her on that eventful night when Helena Spenceley had dined with them, yet that she did not discover any pronounced points of character in him—no particular weaknesses or predilec-

tions on which she could lay hold, as handles by which to manage him. This annoyed her excessively: she puzzled over it, and tried to find a way out of it, and was, almost unknowingly to herself, nourishing towards her son an attitude which was beginning to be one of opposition.

Sebastian's retentive memory held, amongst the other figures with which it was peopled, that of Myles Heywood in a conspicuous and prominent place. A most distinct impression remained in his mind of the workman's defiant attitude and words. What Sebastian felt towards the young man would make too long a tale, and involve too much dry psychological analysis, to be here recorded. Mrs. Mallory had most truly told her son that whether she knew his habits or not, she was sure they were not the habits of Thanshope business men. Something happened just about this time—and Sebastian's method of treating the matter would probably have made the hair of a Thanshope business man

stand on end, or called forth from his tongue emphatically Doric epithets as to the young mill-owner's sanity, and mental capacity in general.

Sebastian never beheld Myles's firmly-set lips and sharply-contracting eyebrows without wondering whether those strongly-marked features were merely signs of an absolutely crabbed disposition and bad temper, or whether they were only traits of a hot temper and quick disposition. He tried in half a dozen ways to find out, but in vain. Myles put on a silent dignity and reserve equal to Sebastian's own, until at last pure accident put the matter to the test.

Some irregularity or insubordination had occurred in one of the rooms, which Sebastian had been discussing with Mr. Sutcliffe, and the latter had said that some one must be told off on the following day to superintend that room—some one in authority. The following morning Sebastian, coming

down to the works, entered the outer office, and found Wilson and Myles there.

'Has Mr. Sutcliffe come?' he inquired.

'Yes, sir,' said Wilson. 'He's in his room.'

'Did he give any orders about the beaming-room?'

'No, sir. He hasn't mentioned it to me.'

'Oh! Well, Heywood, you had better go there and look over them this morning. I can't have them idling about as they have been doing. You had better go at once.'

With that, and without waiting for any answer, he stepped forward into the inner office, and closed the door after him.

Myles went on with his work for some minutes, and then rose.

'If you go to the beaming-room,' observed Wilson, 'I must take your place in the warehouse myself, I suppose.'

'I'm not going to the beaming-room,' was the tranquil reply.

'Not going! But the master——'

'I'm not a Jack-of-all-trades. I know what my business is, and how long it will take me to do it. It is not my business to overlook the beaming-room.'

'But Mr. Mallory didn't know that.'

'So it appears,' said Myles, with a disagreeable smile. 'He'll know it for the future. It's all in the way of learning. You can find some one else to overlook the beamers. I'm off to the warehouse.'

With which he departed, leaving Wilson aghast.

It was through a mere casual question to Wilson that Sebastian found out, later, what had happened. Wilson's evident confusion aroused his suspicions. Dropping his careless tone, he promptly bade the overlooker tell him all that had passed.

Wilson stammered out the whole story even to Myles's remark about it 'all being in the way of learning,' and then stood, looking miserable, and feeling no less so, listen-

ing for the command, 'Send Heywood to me.'

But the command did not come, and Wilson concluded that the dismissal would perhaps be given through Mr. Sutcliffe. That it would be given, and that promptly, he did not doubt, nor was he reassured by the perfect calm and good-temper of Mr. Mallory's expression.

Several days passed, and still Myles Heywood, without let or hindrance, pursued his usual avocations undisturbed; and still Mr. Mallory, calm and good-tempered as ever, continued to learn away at his business; and still he made no remark upon the act of flagrant insubordination which had taken place.

Saturday came some three days after the occurrence just described. It was late in the afternoon, and work had been over for an hour and a half, but the mill was not yet closed, for Mr. Mallory and Mr. Sutcliffe were in the inner office, in consultation, and

Ben, the office-boy, stood lounging outside, wishing that his superiors would bring their parley to an end and let him lock up, and get home to his holiday.

Within, at that moment, there ensued a little pause, and Sebastian rose, looking thoughtful, and leaning against the mantelpiece. Presently he said:

'Well, I suppose there is nothing else for it; we had better put up the half-time notice this afternoon.'

'Yes. There is nothing else for it,' echoed Mr. Sutcliffe. 'It will be no time at all in a few weeks. We can't hold out much longer.'

'Ah!' said Sebastian, and again seemed to fall into a train of thought, until he said:

'I wonder how it will all end. What is there in this life of yours, Mr. Sutcliffe, that gives it its interest? I feel more as if I were really living now than I ever did before. The cotton trade is on its last legs, for a time; and a young man who dislikes me has

behaved with insubordination and impertinence; and yet, though there is nothing intrinsically interesting in those facts, and no connection between them, I feel intensely interested in both.'

'You will excuse my saying it, Mr. Mallory, but it is not discipline to have allowed Heywood to remain a single day in your employment after his openly disobeying an order of yours. It goes very much against my judgment.'

'I know it is neither business nor discipline,' said Sebastian apologetically; 'but you must allow me a little tether now and then, till I am more used to run in harness in this way. I am trying an experiment in regard to that young man. It is a delightful diversion from business. How long has he been here, did you say?'

'Fifteen years, and his sister eleven. Except in the strike, four years ago, they have never missed a day.'

'Exactly. It would decidedly displease

me—it would humiliate me to think that a man who had amicably worked fifteen years during my absence should have to—hook it within a fortnight after my arrival. Besides, he is unusually intelligent, and an admirable workman.'

'Ay, he is. He could direct and manage, if ever he got a rise in life. He has a head on his shoulders as good as any one else's, but that temper of his will be the ruin of him.'

'I don't know about that,' said Sebastian reflectively, as if discoursing with himself. 'That temper of his—I should dearly like to subdue it.'

'I beg your pardon?' said Mr. Sutcliffe, to whom this was as so much Sanscrit.

Sebastian looked up with a smile.

'Leave me my own way in this matter, Mr. Sutcliffe. I promise that, if things do not turn out as I expect, I will dismiss Heywood on Monday.'

At this moment Ben put his head in at the door, and remarked:

'Please, sir, there's your carriage, and the young gentleman in it, a-come for you; and Heywood, he wants to know if he can speak to you.'

'Show him in here, and tell the gentleman I will join him in a few minutes.'

Ben disappeared. Mr. Sutcliffe rose.

'I'll leave you alone with your rebel, Mr. Mallory. I shall be curious to know whether he has come to beg pardon, or to give notice.'

'For my part,' said Sebastian, 'I have no more idea which he will do than an owl in the parish church tower.'

Mr. Sutcliffe laughed and went away, and a moment afterwards Myles Heywood entered the office. Sebastian, still leaning up against the mantelpiece, looked at him, and could read nothing from his expression. He felt that he did not know the man, and he also felt an inexplicable anxiety that the man should not say he was going to leave his service.

'Good-afternoon,' said he courteously; 'you wish to speak to me?'

Myles had taken off his cap, a sign which Sebastian noted instantly.

'Yes,' said he slowly, but not ungraciously. 'You gave me an order the other day, which I took no notice of, and I spoke of you as I ought not to have done. I am sorry that I did so, and I beg your pardon.'

Sebastian had watched him intently, and with keen interest. He saw that Myles had strung himself up to say the words from a sheer sense of what was right and fitting, and from honest conviction that he had done wrong; not from any sudden leaning towards him, Sebastian. And he saw that the anxiety and the uneasiness followed, not preceded the words. He saw that Myles laid great importance upon the manner in which his words were taken.

'It is granted freely,' said Mallory. 'I felt sure that you were too manly not to do this. You have felt that I had no wish to be

capricious, or put you to work that was not yours, when I gave you that order?'

'Yes; I have thought it over, and felt that that was the case.'

'You have worked here fifteen years, and it would have troubled me very much if you had, from any reason, been obliged to leave me as soon as I got here.'

Myles looked up, surprised; but, as Sebastian plainly saw, with a flush of self-reproach. It had not entered into his calculations that Sebastian could possibly take any interest in him or his. The latter went on:

'I am new to my work; you must remember that. Another time, don't let a mistake go so near costing you your place, and me my best workman.'

Myles's face flushed.

'I will certainly bear it in mind,' said he. 'I have a hasty temper, and it leads me astray often, I know.'

'And you do not like me,' said Sebastian, looking steadily at him.

Myles's eyes were also fixed upon his.

'I have not liked you,' he said; 'I should tell a lie if I said even now that I liked you, but I respect you. I shall respect you from this day, and I don't think you will ever have to complain either of disrespect or disobedience from me again.'

'You have relieved my mind very much. I am glad we have had this explanation. It does you credit.'

'The credit is not all with me,' said Myles hastily, with a rising colour and a conscious look, which Sebastian remarked. 'I had some advice from some one, that finished it off. I must go now. Good-afternoon.'

'Good-afternoon,' answered Sebastian, who would have prolonged the conversation if he could; but Myles departed, and Sebastian followed him out of the office.

Standing just without was Sebastian's phaeton, with Hugo holding the reins, and carrying on a conversation with Ben at the same time. Sebastian heard the words:

'Ay, and his mother never got o'er it, hoo didn't. It were main stupid o' Sally Whittaker to say what hoo did——'

Ben stopped abruptly and grew very red in the face, as Sebastian tapped him on the shoulder, inquiring, as he climbed into his place:

'What was so stupid?'

'Go on!' said Hugo to the boy. 'He's telling me about a boy that he knew, who was killed at a factory. Go on! What did Sally Whittaker say?'

'Well, it were i' this way, yo' seen. It were at Ormerod's works as th' lad were killed, and Ormerod come round just as they was takin' th' body away on a shutter; and he says, "Now then, where are you boun'?" he says. And they tould him they were for takkin' him to his mother, and they doubted it would kill her too, for hoo were main fond on him. "Eh, what?" he says. "Yo mun-not do so. Yo mun one on yo go afore, and warn her—prepare her like, a bit," he says.

"Let one o' these ere wenches go on afore." So Sally Whittaker, hoo knew his mother, and hoo said hoo'd go and tell her, and hoo went on afore. Eh, bi th' mass! but hoo is a gradely foo', is Sally Whittaker! and hoo walks into Emma's kitchen, and hoo says, straight out, hoo says, "Eh, Emmer, but troubles is never to seech," hoo says. "Your Johnny's killed as dead as a stoan!"'

'What did the poor woman do?' asked Sebastian, with interest.

'Eh, hoo just dropped th' fryin'-pan, and hoo gave a screech yo' mowt a yeard down to th' town-hall, and then hoo begun to cry, and then they browt him whoam. Mun I lock up, sir, now? Have you finished?'

'Yes, quite,' said Sebastian, with a good-natured nod. 'Lock up, and go home. You've not had much of a holiday this afternoon.'

'Bless you, sir, it's no soart o' consequence,' said Ben, with a gratified look at

this mark of attention; and he retired to lock up again.

'Will you drive?' asked Hugo, when they were alone.

'No; I'll let you drive on, if you will. And, stay! What do you say to a drive in the country before dinner. It will be daylight for a long time yet. If there is any country about here?" he added, with a disparaging look around.

'Oh, lots! While you have been so industriously grubbing away at those figures, and showing me quite a new phase in your character, I have been exploring the interior. I know of four separate and distinct routes to the country. Certainly it is rather stony when one does get there; but it is country, all the same. Will you go north, south, east, or west?'

'Hurrah for the North!' said Sebastian dryly. 'Turn the horses' heads towards Yorkshire, *mein Hugo!*'

Hugo complied. Very soon they were

rattling through the main street. Hugo's attention was taken up with the guiding of his cattle. Sebastian leaned back, a little wearily, and was long silent, until they had left the town behind them—left the dirty straggling suburb called Bridgehouse, and passed through the neighbouring manufacturing village of Hamerton, with its stately houses of gentry and rich millowners, and were out upon a wide, open road, driving past a solemn old house called Stanlaw, deeply sunk in trees. Beyond that, the purple moors spread before them, rising every moment higher and nearer. The sky was pure, the air sweet. As if with a sudden impulse, they both turned and looked behind them. A heavy cloud of smoke showed where Thanshope lay below, in the distance.

Hugo shrugged his shoulders.

'Comfort yourself,' said Sebastian. 'It won't be there long. Soon we shall see what Thanshope looks like without smoke.'

They drove quickly on in the sharp, de-

licious October afternoon air, along the upland road. The heather sprang from the very roadside, and rich, mellow, purple, brown, and crimson, the moors spread themselves around, under the pale, chill blue of the cloudless sky. The peculiar scent of the ling and heather rose like a pastoral incense around them; far away glittered the sinuous line of a canal, and a silvery pond or two. The crack of a gun broke the stillness once or twice.

'Did I not tell you I would bring you out into the country?' said Hugo.

'You always manage to keep your promises, somehow' (they were speaking German now). 'How goes the music under these changed conditions, Hugo?'

The lad smiled his odd smile, and said:

'The more prosaic the surroundings, the more need one has of something like music to brighten them. Don't you think so?'

'Just so. I only asked because I have not noticed you practising, and as for sitting

down and listening to you—why, the last time I did that was when Miss Spenceley was at the Oakenrod.'

'You have been so busy. I have practised hard enough, only your mind was taken up with other things.'

'Ay, with things less artistic than the Sonatas of Beethoven.'

'But not more earnest and workmanlike. Do you know, I like this Thanshope. There is something real in the life these people lead.'

'There is so! And in the things they say, and the way in which they remind you of your duties. There is a fellow I am very curious to know something more about. Do you remember that brusque individual who confronted us the first time we drove to the office?'

'Perfectly well. Do you never see him?'

'Oh, daily. I have just had another shindy with him. He piques me excessively. Every time I see the fellow, with his hand-

some face and defiant eyes—he *has* a pair of eyes—I feel as if I must stop and question him upon his thoughts and feelings. It is a most insane idea, and I know it makes him exceedingly angry; but it is so, all the same. What is that air you are humming, Hugo?'

Hugo held the reins loosely between his fingers, while the horses climbed slowly up the hill: he hummed to himself the half-melancholy air of the German *Volkslied—Der Verschmähete;* and Sebastian listened attentively with a half-smile.

'Aren't you tired, Hugo? Let me take the reins.'

'As you will!' said Hugo, changing places with him, and they turned homewards again.

'Do you remember when we last heard *Der Verschmähete?*' asked Hugo, smiling to himself.

'Perfectly,' said Sebastian concisely. 'Corona Müller sang it, and . . .'

'There was instrumental music, too,' put in Hugo; 'one of Liszt's Hungarian Rhap-

sodies—ay, ay! And it was a Rhapsody too! How splendidly she played it! It would have delighted Liszt himself. Do you remember the end?'

'Yes, yes! *Un poco pesante!*' said Sebastian, who listened attentively to the reminiscences, but volunteered no remark upon the subject.

They were now again in Thanshope, and the dusk was beginning to fall, though it was still far from dark. There had been a silence. Now, as they turned into the main street, Hugo, suddenly taking courage, looked up into his companion's face, and said:

'Sebastian, do you know where she went with her father, from Wetzlar?'

'No. I have seen nothing, and heard nothing of her, since then.'

'But you have inquired?'

'Inquired—naturally. But—ah, there's my handsome young democrat. Just take a good look at him, Hugo—quick! before he turns off—do you hear? What? *Impossible!*'

Hugo had touched his arm, so that his attention was diverted from the figure of Myles Heywood, who was in the act of turning off down a side street, and directed towards that of a young lady going straight down the main street, and whom they were now in the act of passing.

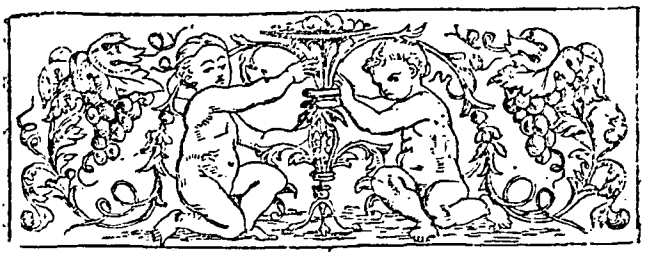
It was nothing remarkable for an expression of lively excitement, pleasurable or otherwise, to be seen upon Hugo's face, but such a look upon Sebastian Mallory's countenance was a rare visitor; and it painted itself there at this moment, as his eye fastened upon the slight figure of the girl, who was pursuing her way, looking neither to right nor left of her. Would she see them? Would she turn? No—yes—no. The drag was just past her, when she casually raised her eyes, and glanced towards the road; and then into her face, too, leapt the same startled look—the same surprise and vivid emotion of some kind, as that which already brightened Sebastian's. She made

a visible pause, as her eyes fell upon the occupants of the drag. Both hats were lifted, two deep bows were made at the same moment; four earnest eyes looked eagerly into her face. With a sudden quick, warm flush, she returned the bow of the young men, and then they had driven on and left her behind them.

They were almost at home now, close to the Oakenrod. No word was spoken, until, as they sprang out of the carriage, their eyes met, Hugo's full of inquiry, Sebastian's of a trouble and excitement strange to them.

'Are you glad?' asked the boy, in a low voice, as they hung up their hats in the vestibule.

'Nay, *mein Bester*—time alone can tell me that. I know no more than you. But here—how did she come here?'



CHAPTER XVI.

'Mais pourquoi pour ces gens un intérêt si grand?'

ONE evening—it was Sunday, the day after that drive into the country—Sebastian Mallory strolled into the drawing-room where his mother sat, and glancing round, seated himself, without speaking, at the piano, on which he struck some aimless chords, which presently developed into a coherent harmony, in a style *un poco pesante.* He played the first bars of Liszt's second *hapsodie Hongroise,* and then paused.

'What is that thumping thing?' inquired Mrs. Mallory, whose many mental supe-

riorities did not include the understanding the art of music.

'This "thumping thing," as you so justly term it, is a "Hungarian Rhapsody," by that Thor the Hammerer of pianoforte music, Franz Liszt.'

'I am as wise as I was before.'

'*N'importe!* Where is Hugo, I wonder?'

No reply.

'You have not seen him?'

'I saw him leave the garden about an hour ago.'

'Gone out for a walk, I suppose. I am glad he can find anywhere to go to.'

'Sebastian, may I ask how long a visit that boy is to pay here?'

'Visit!' said Sebastian, turning round on the music-stool, in some surprise; 'why Hugo lives with me. I thought you knew.'

Mrs. Mallory lowered her favourite weapon, the feathery screen.

'Lives with you? What will you say?'

'I can but repeat my previous statement. He is my ward—you do know that, mother—but then we drop that connection as much as possible. I suppose we are more like brothers than anything else.'

'You are the guardian of his property, then? He is a *von*—is he of noble family?'

'Two questions. He is of noble family. Von Birkenau is a good old name, and he is the last of his race. As for property, he has none—not a scrap.'

'How came you to be his guardian? It was very extraordinary—so young a man as you. Had his family, or whoever left him to you, any claims upon you?'

'It was his mother who left him to me, because I asked her to. She had no claims upon me, in the legal sense of the word; only the claim of having been my great friend, and the source of inestimable benefit to me. Paula von Birkenau was a woman in a thousand, beautiful, good, and gifted; and, I am sorry to say, very unhappy.'

Mrs. Mallory, watching her son's face, thought how odd it was that he should have such queer, out-of-the-way ideas and tastes. What could there be in this memory of an impecunious German countess to bring that smile to his lips, and that light of subdued enthusiasm to his eyes?

'If her son has no property, how did she manage to live?'

'She was penniless when she married, and her husband's family had been a declining one for generations. When he died, she was left without a stick or stone of land or house, and without a penny of fortune. She retired into a *Stift*—an institution, you know, for poor ladies of noble family. There are many like it in Germany. She procured admittance for her son into a place of the same kind—a school, where he was hard-worked and ill-fed, and quite unable to pursue the real bent of his talent, for music. I made the acquaintance of Frau von Birkenau six years ago. I could not describe her; she was a

beautiful soul; she did more for me than any one I have ever known. She talked to me a great deal about her boy, and I went to see him. I liked him, and told her so. She asked me if I would think of him sometimes, and perhaps pay him an occasional visit, when she should be dead; she suffered from a painful complaint, and bore her sufferings like a heroine. I said the best and shortest way would be for her to make a will, appointing me her son's guardian, when I should have full authority over him. This she did, about four years ago, and very shortly afterwards she died. On my signing a document to the purport that henceforth I undertook the duties of a parent to him, the authorities of the school permitted me to remove Hugo, to his and my great satisfaction. Since then he has been my companion in all my ramblings, and though I don't wish to sound my own praises, I must say he looks a different fellow altogether from the white-faced, pinched-looking lad whom I took away with me,

overwhelmed with grief at his mother's death.'

'In-deed!' observed Mrs. Mallory, in cold tones of intense, though repressed exasperation. 'It sounds like a page from a romance. If my opinion were asked, I should say I could hardly tell whether he or you stood most in need of a guardian—of some one to control you. You have encumbered yourself with his entire maintenance? He is a pensioner on your bounty?'

Sebastian shook his head. Leaning his elbow upon the top of the piano, he remarked:

'There is no question of "incumbrance." I love the lad. I delight to see him growing happier every day, and to know that his powers are expanding in the direction best suited to them. It is not every one who can secure the pleasure of enabling an artist nature to grow and develop in a congenial soil. As to his being a "pensioner on my bounty," excuse me, mother, I mean no dis-

respect when I say that I dislike that expression intensely. If you had not used those words, I should not have mentioned that Hugo knows nothing at all of this. All he knows is that I am his guardian. I let him live under the impression that I guard not only himself, but his property. And that impression must not be disturbed. I will not have his happiness embittered just when he should be able to throw aside all care for everything except his studies. He is intensely sensitive. I never approach the subject with him—you understand ?'

'I suppose I do. But I consider it the most amazing piece of folly I ever heard of. How do you know what he may turn out ?'

'How, indeed ? At least he will have had every inducement to turn out well; and, unless I am much mistaken, he will do so. It is not only his name and lineage that is noble.'

'I thought you were a *Radical !*' observed Mrs. Mallory.

'My dear mother!'

'That Frau von Birkenau must have been a clever woman—too clever for you, at any rate.'

'Please don't say anything against her. I would as soon say anything against you as against her,' said Sebastian calmly; and his mother, meeting his eyes, found herself blushing for her own meanness. Such signs of sensibility are often reckoned hopeful.

'Is he to be always here?' she asked quickly, to cover her confusion.

'I don't know. He will please himself. At present England is new to him. He may enjoy it, or study it, until he gets tired of it; and then, I expect, he will go to some German musical *Conservatoire*, to study just as he pleases. I shall give him his choice.'

'Humph!' said Mrs. Mallory, with indescribable significance of tone.

'But, I repeat, he is never to be told of his position. I shall explain it all to him myself, when circumstances make it desirable. And

I think you will get to like him, mother. He is the best-hearted fellow, and perfectly adores those who are kind to him. He is a perfect child in some ways.'

'I don't like young men who are like children.'

'Well, I like Hugo. It would pain me exceedingly to have any misunderstanding with him,' said he, with an emphasis unusual to him, as he turned again to the piano, and solaced himself with a waltz of Schubert.

Mrs. Mallory sat puzzling angrily over the character which daily baffled her more completely; its traits becoming more involved, enigmatical—nay, to her, insane. She considered this freak of his to display an eccentricity not short of insanity, but strangely enough she did not dare to tell him so. Did he care for any one? Was he so devoted to this lad, whom she disliked for his fantastic, unconventional habits and speech, and whom she would regard with contemptuous pity, as

he sat, the morning long, at the piano, absorbed, with strange tossings of the head, and quaint, absent-minded wavings of the hands, and contortions of the body? Or was he only obstinate to have his own way, and provoke her, his mother?'

At this moment the door was opened, and Hugo entered, followed by the butler, with tea.

Mrs. Mallory was too much annoyed to linger over that refreshment. She drank it quickly, and went to her writing-table, where she turned over the papers, listening vexedly the while to the talk between Sebastian and Hugo—talk in which she had no sort of share—about music, and foreign friends, and foreign countries; and she heard Hugo express his rejoicing that at last he could have an hour of Sebastian's company, and she heard Sebastian answer, that he was glad too, for that he missed his companion. And she knew that the tone was one of genuine affection; that Mr. Mallory of the Oakenrod

was perverse enough to pin his affections rather upon an eccentric, penniless German lad, than to make acquaintances which would be to his advantage; that her chance remark about the cleverness of the late Frau von Birkenau had been, in vulgar parlance, 'a bad shot,'—a very bad one indeed, and that she had not increased her own influence by making it.

The laughs and chaff of Hugo and Sebastian became intolerable, as forming a running accompaniment to reflections of this nature. She made another shot, this time unconsciously; and this time she hit her mark, also unconsciously. Picking up a note which lay upon her table, she suddenly interrupted the conversation.

'Sebastian, here is a note—it must go to you now, I suppose. I have nothing more to do with these affairs.'

He looked up; rose and came to fetch it; smiled as he took it; but she would not see either smile or look.

'It is from Mr. Blisset,' she remarked, apparently busily arranging her papers. 'Something about repairs. I cannot imagine what he wants doing, I am sure.'

Sebastian and Hugo exchanged glances.

'Mr. Blisset—who may he be?' inquired Sebastian.

'Your tenant. He lives at Stonegate, that place up at the other end of the town, which your great-grandfather built, and which has always been a great deal more trouble than profit.'

'How long has this Mr. Blisset been its tenant?'

'I'm sure I don't know. Eight or nine years, I think.'

'Do you know anything about him—who he is, or where he comes from?'

'No. He is an invalid—paralysed—a most crotchety, tiresome person.'

'Ah! Let me see what he says.'

He opened the note, and his face changed as he saw the handwriting. It had been

addressed to Mrs. Mallory, as had probably all other communications on the subject. The hand was small, compact, and characteristic—the matter was business-like.

'Mr. Blisset presents his compliments to Mrs. Mallory, and begs to inform her that the outside of his house stands in need of some repairs before the winter sets in. If Mrs. Mallory will have the kindness to send her agent, or the work-people she usually employs, to inspect the house, Mr. Blisset will feel extremely obliged to her.'

Sebastian, without comment, handed the note to Hugo, who read it, with a smile, and an excited expression which caused Mrs. Mallory to set him down in her own mind as a lunatic.

'I will have it seen to!' was all Sebastian said, carefully putting the document into a small letter-case.

'I should send Mitchell to make an esti-

mate: he will do it as cheaply as any one,' observed Mrs. Mallory.

'Yes, it shall be attended to,' repeated her son. 'Now, Hugo, sit down to that piano, and play something—something right lively and soul-stirring, you will understand.'

'I think I do,' said Hugo, smiling in an uncanny manner, as he placed himself at the piano, and straightway burst into a triumphal march.

* * * * *

Later, when Hugo and Sebastian were alone, the former said:

'Now you can go and call, Sebastian.'

'Heaven forbid! I have not the least right to do so.'

'But you would like to. Make a way. Make that note about the repairs an excuse. Call upon Mr Blisset, and find out what sort of an old party he is.'

Sebastian said nothing, and the subject dropped.

The next day, as they sat in Sebastian's study, and he cut the leaves of a Review, he remarked:

'I had a conversation with Myles Heywood to-day.'

'The revolutionary weaver?'

'He is no weaver, ignoramus. He is a sort of head man, but they call him a cut-looker.'

'A how much?'

'A cut-looker. Your education, like mine, has been neglected. But I know now what a cut-looker is. Myles Heywood is one. He earns forty shillings a week. It exercises the brains and the observation, and they have time for reading and thinking, too. Myles Heywood reads. He has read Buckle's "History of Civilisation."'

'Indeed!' said Hugo, sitting with his head on one side, looking like an intelligent dog. 'That does not raise my opinion of him. It is a book I hate.'

'He has read most of the works of John Stuart Mill.'

'I'm glad I don't know him so well as you do.'

'Impertinent!'

'Can he play Beethoven's Sonatas, and paint in oils; and does he sing tenor, baritone or bass?'

'Tsh! I tell you I take the greatest interest in the fellow. He knows a lot of German, too. Where he learnt it I can't tell. When I asked him who taught him he flushed up, looked me straight in the face and said: "A friend." So I had to beg his pardon.'

Sebastian had thrown himself into an easy-chair, and was lighting a cigar.

'Beg his pardon—why?'

'My dear child, you wouldn't say to your equal, "*You* learn German—who teaches you?" and why should you say it to a cut-looker?'

'Well?' said Hugo, seeing the expression

upon Sebastian's face, and knowing it to be no careless one.

'I did beg his pardon, and he said, "Don't mention it." Then I asked him what he meant to do with himself while we were working half-time. He said he had no doubt he could manage to dispose of his own time, and I incautiously persisted, "But how?" He said he really had not thought much about it—might he ask why I wanted to know? So I had to beg his pardon again.'

Sebastian was puffing away, with raised eyebrows. Hugo burst out laughing.

'I never heard of anything so preposterous. Why did you go on talking to him, if you got so vexed?'

'But I didn't. I got interested. Why should the fellow dislike me so intensely? What can be his object?'

'Sebastian! I thought you did not care a straw what any one thought of you. You have said so often enough.'

'Well, and it was generally true—*generally*, mind you. I am interested against my will—personally interested. One thing I've found out—he hates me.'

'Nonsense!'

'Hold your froward tongue! You know how to play Beethoven's Sonatas, and I know what I am talking about. He hates me, and I have made up my mind that he shall, so to speak, eat his words—that is, change his opinion. It will give me endless trouble, I know,' added Sebastian, knocking the ash from his cigar; 'endless trouble, but I will do it. I must know whether that man is master, or I.'

'Oh, if it comes to that,' said Hugo, shrugging his shoulders, and laughing a little; 'if he has excited your obstinate combative instincts, you will never let the poor beggar alone till he at any rate *says* that he gives in. Bless you, I know you!'

'He will never say he gives in unless he actually does so.'

'*Ja, ja!*' said Hugo, nodding significantly, 'I know. May you find the game worth the candle, is the sincere wish of one who gave in long ago to your masterful disposition!'

'Thanks!' laughed Sebastian. 'And as I can't begin this laudable campaign on the instant, I shall carry my investigations into another direction, that, namely, of Stonegate. I am going to call upon Mr. Blisset.'

'At Stonegate—also with a view to conquest?' inquired Hugo politely, rising and walking quickly to the door, and closing it after him just in time for it, instead of his own person, to receive the large bundle of tape-tied 'documents' which Sebastian wrathfully sent flying after him.

CHAPTER XVII.

DISCORD.

THE scene once again the drawing-room of Mr. Blisset's house; its occupants, Myles and Adrienne: he just arrived; she smiling to receive him, and he smiling in answer, as one might smile on suddenly finding a flower peeping up through the snow.

'I rather hoped you would come to-night, to do some German,' said she, 'but I did not think you would come so early.'

'We are working half-time. We began to-day,' said Myles.

'Half-time, already? I thought there was such an enormous supply of cotton somewhere in the country.'

'So there is, somewhere; but it will have to be bought with a price before it can be got at. Lots of other places have begun half time to-day. And it's not only that cotton is dear; there must have come a reaction after last year's over-production. It was tremendous. There is a bad time coming for the workers; but those who can afford to wait, and who know how to use their chances, will make some big fortunes.'

'Some others will lose them, I think.'

'Naturally. The one goes with the other.'

'But how will you all manage when the hard times come?'

'We shall pull through,' said poor, short-sighted Myles, little dreaming of the depths of misery, and what he, and such as he—proud, honest, self-dependent men—considered deepest degradation, which lay in the not far-distant future. 'We shall pull

through. If it is only half-wage we get, we shall have to do with half-doings; pinch a bit, and clem a bit, and put on a good face.'

'But,' said she gravely, 'my uncle and Canon Ponsonby were saying the other night that the time must most likely come when there would be no work, and no wages.'

'If the war lasts a long time, or the ports are very well blockaded, it may come to that,' said Myles calmly. 'But we, and a good many others beside us, have money laid by. We must live on that till better times come.'

In six months from that time, thousands of working homes were stripped of every stick of furniture that could possibly be done without. Many a savings-bank had collapsed. Many a stout-hearted toiler had to bend his proud, unwilling feet towards the relief committee, or the guardians, and with burning face, and bursting heart, and down-drooped head, tell his tale, and ask for 'charity.' Not yet had the 'Lancashire Lad' sent to the *Times* that pathetic account

of the shamefaced girls who stopped him to ask him, 'Con yo help us a bit?' that appeal which brought the tears to thousands of eyes of readers in every end of the earth. None of this had happened yet. The great 'panic' had not come swooping down upon the land; but it was not long before the cry of the distressed must go up.

Myles Heywood, after this his first half-day's enforced idleness, perhaps not ill-pleased to be freed for a few hours, on a fine afternoon, from his toil, said he had no fears for the future. He felt himself strong; felt that a little pinching and 'clemming' would do him no material harm, and smiled at the storm-cloud hurrying across the Atlantic.

They went on talking upon indifferent topics; but while she questioned or answered, his jealous eyes detected some change in her. She was not cold to him; there was the same genial grace and cordiality, and yet there was a change. In a pause which presently ensued, a footstep passed on the flags outside.

She raised her head quickly and looked up, with parted lips and a startled expression.

'Do you expect some one?' asked Myles; and so much were the words a part of the thought, that he scarcely knew he had spoken them, until she answered:

'I—oh no! Why should I? But shall we not read some more of "Iphigenia?" Here is the book.'

She did not look at him. There was a sudden constrained expression upon her face as she opened the book, and he as suddenly felt his heart sink with a reasonless, aimless, lover's pang. He said nothing, however, but obediently began to read. But neither his heart nor hers was in the work, as usual. She had told him that he was an apt scholar; his intelligence was ready, and his ear, quick, and attuned to the Lancashire gutturals, and its broad 'a's' and 'u's' found little difficulty with the corresponding German sounds. Myles, for his part, had treasured up that hour that she devoted to him once or twice a

week, as if it had been some precious coin or gem. Then she was all attention to him; then she was thinking of nothing else but him and his lesson, and the idea was heavenly. But this very evening, for the first time, he was obliged to let himself understand that her attention wandered, that she sometimes scarcely heard what he said, and his anxiety and foreboding increased every moment. He was no favoured lover; he had striven assiduously to conceal every sign of his devotion, for fear it should annoy her, or repel her. He had no right to ask her why her attention strayed, what made her absent and distraite, and that very fact made him the more sensitive to the change in her manner.

He read on, and translated, mechanically, dreamily, till he came to the words:

'Und künft'ge Thaten drangen wie die Sterne,
Rings um uns her, unzählbar aus der Nacht.'

'"And future deeds,"' he slowly trans-

lated, while the sense of discord and oppression grew every moment stronger; '"and future deeds pressed about us, out of the night, countless as the stars." . . .'

She had not heard a word. He looked at her, with eyes that dared not be reproachful and said nothing. There was pain, there was embarrassment, in her expression. Then she suddenly said:

'I want to speak to you. Let us put away this book. I want to tell you something that I ought to have told you before.'

At once his face changed: the cloud fled; he turned to her with a smile.

'Something you ought to have told me——' he began.

The door was opened. Just outside they heard the voice of Brandon, Mr. Blisset's old servant, saying:

'I will see whether Mr. Blisset is at liberty, sir, if you will step in here.'

Then he threw the door wide open, and announced:

'Mr. Mallory.'

Sebastian came into the room, and Adrienne rose, feeling like one in a dream, looking like a person who has received overwhelming news of some kind. She saw Sebastian; she felt that Myles was there—felt it in every fibre of her being, and while Sebastian spoke to her, she was only intensely conscious that Myles was gazing at them both; and she wondered, with an intensity that amounted to pain, what he was thinking of her.

She gazed at Sebastian, as he came up to her, looking as if he saw no one but her with extended hand, and she heard him as he said:

'Miss Blisset, I little thought, before Saturday, that I should have the happiness of meeting you again—in Thanshope!'

With that their hands closed, and her voice said (with a vibration):

'It is certainly long since we met. I am glad to see you again.'

Myles had risen, with a swift, almost unconscious impulse, and was now in the window, leaning against it, and looking into the night which was now falling fast. He closed his eyes. He felt his own emotion to be almost grotesque in its intensity, but it was so—he could not help it. The devil jealousy had seized his very heart-strings on the instant, and clutched them relentlessly. There was one thing, and one only, that he could do—having no right to call her to account, he could suffer in silence, and speak gently to her—after all, he reminded himself, she had been exquisitely kind to him, and he had no sort of claim upon such kindness.

While Myles fought this silent, desperate battle with the feelings which urged him to rush out of the room, and leave those two together, Sebastian was saying :

'I came to see Mr. Blisset on some business and his servant asked me to come in here. I fear I disturb you.'

'Not at all. May I introduce—but Mr. Heywood tells me he knows you already.'

She turned to Myles, who also turned. His very emotion made him rise to the occasion. Pride and self-esteem, respect and regard for Adrienne, modesty as to his own merits, all urged him to put on an outwardly calm demeanour; and Sebastian, whatever astonishment he might feel, was of course far too civilised to betray it.

'We have met already to-day, earlier,' remarked Mr. Mallory, courteously bowing towards the young man, who, on his part, bowed his head gravely and proudly, and wished his employer good-evening. If Adrienne had not flushed up, and looked with such startled, conscious eyes, and such a half-excited smile, around her, he could have done even more—he might have been able to force a smile too, but under the circumstances it was physically impossible.

Adrienne, turning aside, as if to push forward a chair, looked at him, but in his then

state of mind he could not understand the glance; all he could do was to answer it with another, of bitter, clouded, miserable feeling; sorrow, pain, and a sort of premonitory despair.

Sebastian did not see Adrienne's look, but he did see this one of Myles's, and it made him feel suddenly grave and doubtful. In an instant he understood how things were with Myles: as to Adrienne's feelings he was utterly in the dark. He remembered one morning, when she, relieved through his efforts of great anxiety, had clasped his hand, and looking up at him with brimming eyes, had said: 'There is nothing I would not do for you.' They had been almost the last words she had said to him. The day afterwards he had lost her. He knew nothing of what she thought of him now, but he realised immediately that the stiff-necked young workman, whose pride and reserve resisted all his efforts to break through them, was over head and ears in love with the

woman of whom he had been thinking, when he spoke to Helena Spenceley of 'the nicest girl I ever knew.' It might be preposterous: it might be that young, handsome, and more than ordinarily high-spirited and ambitious young workmen had no business to fall in love with young ladies in a superior position in life; but all that did not prevent the fact that such an occurrence had taken place before, and would take place again. Sebastian knew it, and, reasoning from the interest he himself took in Myles, did not underrate the importance of the discovery he had made.

'Have you seen the evening edition of the Manchester paper?' he asked Myles, as he seated himself.

'To-night? No.'

'The war news seems rather important. I hope our neutrality won't be put in peril. It would be an everlasting disgrace to us if it were to be interrupted for a moment.'

'Yes, it would,' assented Myles, dimly

conscious that it was a superior sophistication which was able to converse thus easily upon foreign affairs—under the circumstances.

'I suppose you take a great interest in the war, too?' said Sebastian, turning to Adrienne.

'Yes,' she replied. 'Mr. Heywood and I have the audacity to dispute even with my uncle sometimes.'

'Mr. Blisset is your uncle?'

'Yes. Oh! I forgot you could not know; I live with him here. Have you known him before?'

'Never. But I find he is my tenant. I came to see him on a matter of business, and——'

'Will you step into the other room, sir?' interrupted Brandon, coming in.

Sebastian rose.

'Shall I see you again?' he asked, stooping a little towards Adrienne, who looked up to him with the same distinct, though well-

repressed, agitation or excitement of some kind in her face.

'It will depend upon how long you stay; I do not know,' said she; and her voice was not calm and deliberate, as usual.

Myles sat still, his face composed, watching those two; realising her grace and beauty, and his charm of manner, and all those advantages in the background. No girl—he felt it keenly—need be ashamed of the fact that she had fallen captive to the wooing of Sebastian Mallory. His heart grew heavier and colder.

'Then I will say good-evening, in case I do not see you again,' said Sebastian.

They shook hands, and Mallory followed the waiting Brandon.

Then they were left alone. Adrienne's face had changed; the excitement had gone from it; it was pale; the glow had faded; her voice sounded tired when she spoke.

'When Mr. Mallory came,' she said, forcing a smile, 'I was just going to explain

to you that I knew him—or rather, had known him a few years ago. It was curious that he should call at that very moment.

'Yes,' said Myles, in a voice as colourless as her own.

'Once he was very kind,' she pursued, 'when my father was in trouble. He saved me a great deal of anxiety and distress.'

'Yes,' again assented Myles. 'I am sure he is very considerate, and means to do right.'

'You think so! Then your opinion has changed?'

'Yes, very much. He is not at all the kind of man I supposed him to be.'

'I am glad you have discovered that. I am sure you and he will get on, now that the misunderstanding is cleared up.'

Myles rose, smiling rather a faint, miserable smile. He felt it impossible not to give one little thrust in the midst of the agony he was himself enduring.

'You know I am hot-tempered, and, I am afraid, prejudiced,' said he quietly; 'but if

you had mentioned to me that you knew Mr. Mallory, and that he was not the kind of man I supposed, I should—perhaps I might have behaved more rationally.'

Adrienne stood speechless. She made neither apology nor excuse. When he said good-night, she put out her hand silently, and did not meet his eyes. His own manner was quiet to coldness. Thus they parted. Myles, as he walked home, could not forget the verse from 'Iphigenia,' which he had laboriously translated:

'Und künft'ge Thaten drangen wie die Sterne,
Rings um uns her, unzählbar aus der Nacht.'

In that moment he doubted bitterly whether any deeds, whether anything but woes, lay for him in the future.

Meanwhile Adrienne was left alone to reflect upon the situation, to think of Sebastian's smile, and of Myles Heywood's pale face and glowing eyes; and, after due reflection, either to congratulate or commiserate herself, as she thought most appropriate.

CHAPTER XVIII.

'MAY MY MOTHER CALL UPON YOU?'

MR. MALLORY contrived to make his visit so delightful to Mr. Blisset, that that gentleman pressed him, with an eagerness unwonted to him, to remain a little longer; and Sebastian, hoping each moment to see Adrienne appear, continued in his place.

At last she came into the room; but she had brought her work with her, and, after a few sentences of courtesy, amiable but meaningless, she took a chair a little apart, and sat in almost entire silence, while the

two men discussed, first politics, and then, when each had taken the length of the other's foot on that topic, science and philosophy.

Sebastian, whether intentionally or not, showed himself in his best mood, and putting aside both cynicism and indifference, discussed the subjects earnestly, and incidentally displayed how much thought and attention he had really given to them.

Mr. Blisset, greatly delighted at finding so cultivated a listener, was also in a happier and more hopeful mood than usual. Adrienne's eyes were fixed upon that monotonous embroidery. It is to be presumed that she did not see the repeated glances, half of inquiry, half of surprise, with which Sebastian's eyes continually sought her face. He knew that she could talk on such subjects. Mr. Blisset's reiterated appeal to her — 'Eh, Adrienne?' 'Don't you think so, my dear?'— showed Sebastian that she was not accustomed to sit in silence at the feet of even so

great a philosopher as her uncle; and yet she was silent now, merely answering when spoken to, as briefly as possible.

At length came a pause, and Sebastian hastened to make use of it.

'How do you like England, Miss Blisset?'

'I can hardly say, seeing that I only know Thanshope.'

'Thanshope, then, as compared with the Continent in general?'

'I like it,' said Adrienne, 'because I have found a home in it, and because I am useful to some one—am I not, uncle?'

'Necessary, my dear, necessary.'

'There, you see! necessary!' said Adrienne.

'But you used to rejoice so intensely in the sunshine, and the poetry, and the beauty of those foreign lands.'

'Yes, I did.'

'Wetzlar, for instance. Do you remember how delighted you were? how you sat dreaming by Goethe's Brünnen, and how you seated

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yourself in Lotte Buff's parlour, and looked round, and could scarcely speak ?'

'Ah, yes !' said Adrienne, her eyes lighting up at the remembrance, and a smile stealing over her face; 'but that was very enchanted ground, you know.'

'And you struck a few chords on that piano; that "old, tuneless instrument," on which Goethe had played to Lotte, and then drew back, quite ashamed of your own audacity—you must remember ?'

'Did I ever say I did not remember ?' said Adrienne, a tremor in her voice, as she looked up and found Sebastian leaning forward, his chin in his hand, and his eyes fixed upon her face.

Something in the expression of those eyes seemed to cause Adrienne some emotion. Her colour rose. Mr. Blisset had opened a newspaper which his servant had brought in, and was apparently buried behind it. Sebastian, his eyes still fixed upon the young lady's troubled face, said softly :

'Don't you think Wetzlar was the most sunshiny place you were ever in?'

'At least the sun began to shine for me there,' she said quickly, and looking towards him with a sudden, deeper glance than before.

He smiled.

'I think, for me too.' Then, seeing that she looked still more downcast, he added: 'But we shall meet again, I hope, and then we can discuss those old days. I was going to ask, have you many friends here?'

'Scarcely any. My uncle does not visit. We know Canon Ponsonby, and Mrs. Ponsonby called upon me, and was very kind. Then I have a few friends of my own peculiar kind, you know.'

'I know. Old applewomen at street-corners, working-people; unhappy youths who want a few lessons in this and that—eh?'

'Yes,' said Adrienne, smiling.

'Then Myles Heywood is not counted amongst your friends?' said Sebastian com-

posedly, glancing aside at Mr. Blisset, to assure himself that that gentleman was absorbed in his newspaper.

'Yes, he is,' said Adrienne, raising her head. 'He is a friend both of my uncle's and mine.'

'Is it allowable to ask how you made his acquaintance?'

Adrienne suddenly crimsoned, while Sebastian unkindly continued steadfastly to watch her. He had been piecing different facts and inferences together in his mind, and was rather anxiously awaiting her answer.

'It is not allowable?' he said. 'I beg your pardon.'

'Yes, it is, quite,' retorted she, somewhat recovering herself. 'I met Myles Heywood a few weeks ago, not more. I used to have some work that I did at the public reading-room, and he used to read there too. He rendered me a very kind service on one occasion, and has been a friend and a visitor here ever since.'

Sebastian bowed politely.

'He interested me,' said he, with a rather ambiguous smile. 'I wished to know more of him; but he declines every advance I make to him.'

Adrienne was silent. Sebastian, with a laudable thirst for information, went on, in the same calm, matter-of-fact voice:

'I begin to think that in his case appearances deceived me' (Adrienne looked rapidly up and down again). 'There is something wonderfully attractive about his face and manner. He appears so very superior to his class, and yet—I begin to fancy there must be some fatal defect of temper—some moral want.'

'You are mistaken,' said she, in a voice which, though low, was so clear and decided as to startle Sebastian. The information he wished for appeared to be readily forthcoming—whether it were of a pleasant nature or not, he could hardly yet say.

'You think so? You think it is not mere

churlishness?' he said, purposely using a strong word.

'He has not a grain of the churl in him.'

'Indeed! Then he must have well-developed imitative faculties,' said Sebastian, with a politely sceptical accent which he had often found useful as a conversational weapon. It was successful upon this occasion. Adrienne answered quickly:

'You must not think him churlish. It would be a grievous mistake to make. He has a most generous disposition. You should see him at home with his sister and his cripple brother—they are friends of mine too, and his deaf friend, Harry Ashworth. You would not misjudge him then. Those people know his heart, as it is—and they all adore him. Churlish—no!'

'Well, does he behave in such an extraordinary way to Mr. Blisset? does he look at him as if he would say, "Thus far, and no further. Keep your distance, if you please?"'

'To my uncle—oh, no! He is very fond of him, and very respectful to him,' said Adrienne demurely, a curious little smile quivering about the corners of her mouth.

'Then why does he select myself as the object of his hatred—for I am sure he does hate me?'

'He—because——'

'Because?'

'I cannot explain. Only he does not hate you.'

'I am convinced you could tell me all about it if you would, so as you will not, I must find it out in my own way. I am determined I will learn the reason of his aversion to me—and will overcome it.'

'Oh, don't! Pray let him alone. He is best let alone.'

Sebastian smiled.

'You seem to be well acquainted with what is best for him—though you have only known him a few weeks. If you have suc-

ceeded in making a friend of him, why should not I ?'

'I would not go too far. Remember, he, as well as you, has a right to choose his own friends, and if he does not choose you for one of them, you have no right to——'

'Importune him? No. You are quite right,' he said, rising. 'But—there is society of a different stamp from Myles, Heywood even in Thanshope. Would you have any objection to my mother calling upon you ?'

'Mrs. Mallory — objection ? Not the least. I should be delighted. But don't you think, if she had wished for my acquaintance, she would have called before ?'

'She was ignorant that you lived here. She thought Mr. Blisset's household was quite without ladies. I expect she will call upon you within the next few days.'

'I shall be happy to see her,' said Adrienne politely, but not enthusiastically; and he could read nothing from her eyes, as they answered his inquiring gaze. She roused

her uncle from his abstraction, and Sebastian dropped her hand with a smile. After all, he told himself, it was absurd to think seriously of Myles Heywood as a rival—quite absurd. A high cultivation like Adrienne's—and how different she was from that little dark-eyed Helena, with her vehemence, and her disorganised ideas as to women's rights and man's selfishness—could surely never feel any real affinity with that untamed, untutored specimen of humanity, Myles Heywood. There might be plenty of force about him, but force without culture is apt to get uncomfortable.

Amidst earnest requests from Mr. Blisset that he would speedily renew his visit, and equally earnest assurances on his part that he would do so, Sebastian departed.

* * * *

In the Oakenrod drawing-room, Mrs. Mallory by the fire, with a novel and the feathery screen; Hugo, gloating over a copy of the original edition of Bewick's 'Birds,'

the like of which treasure, he considered, he had never seen before; for the rest, silence.

'You have been out all evening?' inquired Mrs. Mallory languidly, as she looked up.

'Yes, I have been at Mr. Blisset's.'

Hugo looked up.

'Mother, do you ever call at Mr. Blisset's house?'

'No. Soon after he came, I called; but his man-servant told me that he was a great invalid, and saw no one.'

'He is certainly a great invalid. But there is a Miss Blisset.'

'Is he a widower?' asked Mrs. Mallory, struck by something in her son's tone, dimly conscious of some impending unpleasantness in store for herself.

'She is his niece. She came to live with him some two years, or eighteen months, ago. I was delighted to renew my acquaintance with her.'

'Then you had met her before?'

'Yes; at Coblentz, and at Wetzlar, on the Lahn.'

Sebastian was at the present moment leaning on the top of his mother's chair, which was a deep, roomy easy-chair of a bygone day. As he spoke he took the feathery screen out of her hand and fanned her with it a little. She wished he would not do so. It might not make it more really difficult to resist him, but it made her look very ungracious; it must look ungracious in a mother to deny favours to a son who asked them in so seductive a manner.

Mrs. Mallory thought there were certain points upon which she would never give in; but even while she thought it, and Sebastian's hand waved the screen to and fro, and his voice gently continued to speak—even then, she had an indefinable sensation of being managed—that power was slipping from her hands into his. But she could say nothing until he had in some way committed himself;

and he had a most provoking habit of not committing himself.

'She is as clever and accomplished in her way as her uncle is in his,' Sebastian went on; 'and she is, in addition, a most charming young lady. She has no friends here—and she is so different from the Thanshope people—much more in your style than that vehement little Miss Spenceley,' he added, while Hugo looked on from afar and laughed in his sleeve. 'I am sure you would like her if you knew her, and I want you to be so kind as to call upon her.'

'Call upon her! Call upon a person I know nothing about! Really, Sebastian, I wonder at you!'

'My dear mother, she is not in the least what you would describe as a "person." Even your critical taste will pronounce her a thorough lady when you see her.'

'How is it nobody else has called upon her?'

'Some one else have. Mrs. Ponsonby has

called upon her. But I want you to call upon her. You really would oblige me exceedingly, mother, if you would.'

'And therefore I must, I suppose. That appears to be the rule by which the young judge the old in the present day,' said Mrs. Mallory a little acidly.

Sebastian had come round to the other side, and was leaning against the mantelpiece, and as Mrs. Mallory concluded her remark she looked at her son, and her son looked at her. If he had only been talking about Helena Spenceley! But it was merely some Miss Blisset. She thought she would refuse. But at that moment the idea struck her that she might even serve her own aims by consenting conditionally.

Scarcely two days before, Sebastian had treated, first with levity and contempt, and then with downright repugnance, the prospect of dining at the Spenceleys' house, or cultivating their further acquaintance. Mrs. Mallory had at that moment in her pocket a

note, in Helena's handwriting, requesting the pleasure of the company of Mrs. and Mr. Mallory, and that of Mr. von Birkenau, to dinner ten days hence.

'If I go out of my way to make new acquaintances, about whom I care nothing in the world, it is only fair that you should put yourself a little out of the way too, Sebastian.'

'Perfectly fair. As how?'

'We are invited to dine at the Spenceleys' on the —th. If you don't go there, and behave civilly to my friends, I really don't see how I can encourage yours, about whom I know nothing, to come here, or go to see them myself.'

'I quite grasp the importance of the situation,' said Sebastian, with that placid politeness which exasperated Mrs. Mallory beyond bounds, because she did not know into what language to translate it. 'If you will call upon Miss Blisset within the next day or two—I mean a proper call, you know, with

an intimation that you would like her to return it, and so on—I will go to any amount of Spenceley spreads, be they never so gorgeous, and will listen to Miss Spenceley's diatribes with the utmost resignation. There will be the contrast to think of.'

This was not very encouraging behaviour; but it was the best to be extracted from her very 'trying' son, and Mrs. Mallory had to accept it, merely remarking:

'If your friend Miss Blisset has anything like the good qualities of Helena, I shall be surprised.'

'No she has not,' said Sebastian. 'Miss Spenceley has one hundred thousand golden virtues—not to mention others of a less tangible character—of a kind that Adrienne Blisset knows nothing about.'

Mrs. Mallory made a note of the 'Adrienne Blisset,' and began to feel an intense dislike to that young lady.

But the bargain had been struck. On the third day after the treaty had been, so to

speak, signed, Mrs. Mallory called out her horses and called out her men, and drove in state to see and overwhelm Miss Blisset.

She saw her; but the overwhelming remained still a dream of the future. Adrienne's utter want of embarrassment in the presence of Mrs. Mallory, of the Oakenrod, might be in bad taste, but it could not very well be commented upon. She parried all her visitor's hidden thrusts upon the subject of Sebastian with a cool adroitness which called forth that lady's reluctant admiration, and behaved altogether with an ease and an address which was the more reprehensible in that it seemed so perfectly natural.

'But it could not have been natural,' reflected Mrs. Mallory, as she drove away. 'The attention, after Sebastian's calling there and finding her, was so marked. I think she is the most consummate little actress I ever met, anywhere.'

CHAPTER XIX.

'I DREAMT I DWELT IN MARBLE HALLS.'

CASTLE HILL, the Spenceley mansion, was a large, new, imposing residence of red brick, with massive stone facings. It had been the dwelling of Mr. Spenceley and his family for some six or seven years, and it was within these walls that Helena sat in captivity, and groaned alternately over the selfishness of men and the mean-spiritedness of women.

On the appointed evening, Mrs. Mallory, her son and Hugo, were driven to this mansion, and ushered into the drawing-room. It was an apartment vast in dimensions, lofty,

dazzling, perfectly square, perfectly gorgeous, and more than perfectly uncomfortable.

Some ten or twelve persons were collected somewhere amidst the mass of gorgeous carpet, hangings, furniture, and dazzling crystal drops which seemed to blend and combine in a determined and successful effort to crush and annihilate the human portion of the scene. Sebastian and Hugo saw Mrs. Mallory sail up to a massive-looking lady in purple satin, white lace, and unlimited jewellery of florid design and great brilliance. This lady she greeted almost affectionately. Was she not Helena's mother? and did not Mrs. Mallory herself regard Helena almost as a daughter? Having introduced Sebastian and Hugo, Mrs. Mallory turned to Mr. Spenceley, while the young men bowed themselves before the mistress of the house.

She said she was very glad to see them. Then she told Sebastian that she had heard a great deal about him, and then she looked hurriedly around for 'Mr. Spenceley.'

That gentleman, who had been exchanging courtesies in a loud and blatant voice with Mrs. Mallory, now began to welcome Sebastian to his native place, also in a loud and blatant manner.

'Well, sir, I'm glad to see you. Come home just in the nick of time, you have. You've a grand opportunity for making your fortune now. Gad! But it's providential, this American business! We shall get rid of some of our surplus stock now. It'll give us a pull over our work-people too, at last; and not before we need it. The fellows were getting beyond everything, eh?'

Sebastian, his calm and serious eyes quietly scanning the strong, if coarse, under-bred face of the man before him, merely said that he was quite new to this kind of thing. He had not considered the subject in that light at all.

'Well, I should advise you to do so as soon as possible then, or you'll lose your chance,' shouted Mr. Spenceley, whose voice

was elevated so as to drown entirely those of the rest of the company, while his wife timidly looked on, her florid face set gravely, and her eyes round and staring with a sort of anxious attentiveness.

Sebastian foresaw that he would have to take her in to dinner, and he glanced at her now and then, wondering what he should say to her—how keep up some kind of a conversation. She was a tall, stout, matronly woman; once she must have been an extremely handsome lass. Her black hair was still abundant, and had something of the waviness of Helena's; her eyes, too, were dark. She was as tall as her daughter, but more lymphatic in temperament.

Helena probably inherited her beauty from her mother, and her vehemence from her father. Mrs. Spenceley was accustomed to roll in her carriage through Bridgefold and Lower Place, suburbs of Thanshope, and to look from her elevation upon the extensive matrons who stood at their cottage doors, ex-

changed gossip, and scolded their ingenuous offspring, sporting in the road before them; but her nature was the same as theirs. Denude her of her silks and satins, attire her in a cotton or linsey gown, with bare arms and a large apron, her hair twisted up into a knot behind, and her head capless; a cottage full of cares and unruly children, a rough 'measter' to make and mend and 'do' for, and she would have been indistinguishable from those other matrons. She would have fallen back into the old ways quite genially and naturally; she would have been what she certainly was not under existing arrangements—happy.

For Mrs. Spenceley was unhappy in her riches and greatness; she could remember quite distinctly the days when Spenceley had been overlooker at one of the great Thanshope factories, and she had done the work of the house, and brought up the children single-handed, and was happy—and not genteel. She remembered the sudden

leap into prosperity, the gradually increasing establishment, Helena dismissed to a fashionable boarding-school, and Fred to a private and select academy, where he was to learn how to become a gentleman—that short, easy, and every-day process, where, as a matter of fact, he had drunk in one lesson, and one only, namely, that a fellow whose father has money, and who will one day have money himself, need not know or do, or be anything—except rich. Mrs. Spenceley remembered how servants, of whom she stood in awe, had accumulated around her; how she had had to leave her kitchen to their tender mercies; how she had found that she must not handle a duster, or have an opinion as to the merits of the heave-shoulder or the wave-breast any longer; until she had got a magnificent housekeeper, in black silk and a lace cap, who was fully conscious of the primordial fact that large and wealthy establishments only existed in order that she might domineer over one of them. How Helena

was returned upon her hands, a 'finished' young lady, ignorant, as it seemed to Mrs. Spenceley in her own ignorance, of the very elements of a womanly education—unable to keep house, to cook, to sew, even to distinguish ribs of beef from sirloin. She had ventured, mildly, to utter some of her woe to the father, who had said: 'Pooh! Let the lass alone. She'll never need to know such things. She shall marry a lord! Only don't let her cross me, and she'll do.' And Helena had been suffered to trample upon the domestic arts, and to throw herself, with all the energy of one who has nothing to do with herself, into all sorts of questions about which her active brain made her curious, while her unfinished education left her profoundly ignorant of their practical bearings. She had no female friends except Mrs. Mallory and Miss Mereweather, a conspicuous friend and upholder of 'the cause.' She loved Mrs. Mallory, because that lady was kind to her, and was by no means a nonentity; and she adored

Miss Mereweather because of her talents, or what seemed to Helena her talents.

Friends at home the girl had none. Fred had one of those hopelessly dense natures which may be called the complacently brutal —nothing in the way of friendship or sympathy was to be had from him. Her father —Helena, in her intercourse at school with girls of good family and social surroundings, had learnt to know that her father's manners and language were to be abhorred, while, had he been a Sir Charles Grandison in the matter of deportment, his coarse bullying and ferocious bantering of her mother would alone have made the hot-spirited girl almost hate him.

And Fred—his mother stood in profound awe of him; his talk, his slang, his ways in general; and she was the one soul on earth, except himself, who was firmly convinced of the fact that Frederick Spenceley was at once a finished gentleman and a consummate man of the world.

As Sebastian sat watching his hostess, and partly divining some of these facts, a voice at his elbow roused him.

'Good-evening, Mr. Mallory. You look as if you were dreaming.'

Looking quickly round, he saw Helena standing close beside him, smiling as frankly as if no misunderstanding had ever existed between them, as if they had not quarrelled violently within two hours of first seeing each other. How lovely she was! None but a very lovely woman could have stood the dull ivory satin dress she wore, fitting tight, without a fold or a crease in the waist; and, in an age of voluminous, portentous crinolines, trailing straight and long behind her. She wore a black lace fichu, and elbow-sleeves with black lace ruffles falling from them. The fichu was fastened with a golden brooch; beyond that was not a ribbon, not a frill, not a jewel or a flower about her. And her beauty came triumphant through the ordeal.

They had parted on decidedly evil terms,

and he was surprised now to find that she welcomed him cordially, and smiled as she took the chair beside him.

'I'm afraid. I was very cross the other night,' said she, with a sunny smile. 'But I thought you had treated me badly, and I am going to have my revenge to-night, and show you that I am in earnest. My greatest friend, Laura Mereweather, has most fortunately been able to come just when I invited her. Wasn't that wonderful?'

'I am prepared to say that it was; but I don't yet know why.'

'You know Miss Mereweather; by name, at least?'

'To my shame I must confess that I never even heard of her before.'

'What an extraordinary thing! She has a European reputation.'

'You astonish me! For what?'

'As being the most advanced female thinker, and the greatest benefactor to her sex, of her time.'

Sebastian's face fell, as he looked round the room.

'These very intellectual women have often nothing remarkable in their personal appearance,' said he. 'Would you believe that, of the several young ladies I see seated about the room, I could not say which I should suppose to be Miss Mereweather.'

'*That,*' said Helena impressively, 'that slight girl, all intellect, and mind, and spirit, talking to my brother—that is Laura!'

'Is it really?' he said, his eyes falling upon the ethereal-looking being described by Helena.

He saw a thin, nervous-looking girl—a girl with not a bad face, if it could not be called absolutely handsome. She too was dressed, like Helena, in a tightly-fitting robe with undistended skirts, but her dress was black. She wore an eyeglass, looked restlessly around, and had a deep contralto voice. There was nothing alarming in her appearance; she looked, thought Sebastian, as if

'she would have made an excellent head-mistress of a large school, the matron of a hospital, or some authority of that description.

'She is a woman of powerful individuality, I should say,' he remarked.

'Is she not? After dinner she shall talk to you.'

'Oh, you are very kind! I wouldn't trouble her for the world.'

'It is no trouble. Nothing done for the cause would be a trouble to Laura; and then you must be enlightened. You must learn that ours is not a cause to be treated with levity. You must be punished for what you did and said the other night,' said Helena.

'I submit; but—I am sure you could talk just as well,' said Sebastian resignedly.

'Ah, if I could!' said Helena, gazing with admiring devotion towards her friend.

'Is there not an immensity of power and force about her?' she said enthusiastically. 'Laura has several times been mistaken for a

man—by persons who have heard her voice and her remarks, without seeing her.'

'Has she? How excessively annoying for her!' said Sebastian, with feeling.

'Annoying! It pleases her, as a testimony to her power, and as a proof that there is no real disparity in the respective capacities of men and women. Of course, when it is known that books or pictures have been written or painted by women, all hope of fair and impartial criticism is over.'

'Is it? Well, I was looking at the question from another point of view. I thought that if Miss Mereweather disapproves so strongly of men in general, it would annoy her to be mistaken for one of that odious and inferior sex; and, moreover, would only be a sign of how very different she must be from most women.'

'She is very superior to most women; if that is what you mean, I concede the point willingly.'

'Well, if such a superior woman is often

mistaken for a man, is not that a piece of negative evidence of the inferiority of women in general ?' he asked politely.

Helena's face had flushed again.

'As I said, Laura shall talk to you. She will argue much better than I can. I do not pretend to her abilities. And there is Parsons announcing dinner,' added Helena hastily, her colour mounting still higher as she caught Sebastian's eyes fixed with a grave, yet not unkindly, expression upon her face.

He rose to offer Mrs. Spenceley his arm, and stood with her, watching the couples as they filed out of the room. Yes, Helena was lovely, and not all her wild talk, not even her enthusiastic admiration for Miss Mereweather, could make her otherwise.

He looked absently on, as first his mother and Mr. Spenceley went by; next a gorgeous dowager, whose tribal name and standing were unknown to him, but whom he distinctly heard saying something about 'the

oist at the Lang'um 'otel,' as she swept past, on the arm of a flaccid-faced, red-haired, meek-looking man, pertaining to the goodly company of cotton-spinners. The wife of the said cotton-spinner followed next, with a gentle-looking incumbent — he who ministered to the spiritual needs of Mr. Spenceley and his family. More couples followed. Fred Spenceley with Miss Mereweather — more gorgeous dowagers and resplendent spinsters, and more of the native young men, leading the same to the banquet, and, at last, Helena, in her creamy robes, with Hugo.

'The lucky young dog!' thought Sebastian resignedly, as Hugo's eyes met his, and the lad smiled rather triumphantly, in the full consciousness that he was leading out the prettiest woman in the room.

Was she talking women's rights now? Sebastian wondered, as he silently brought up the rear with the equally silent Mrs. Spenceley. No! She was laughing with

Hugo, like any other pleasant, well-conditioned girl, and asking him to tell her exactly how he spelt his name, and if it had any particular meaning.

'For I know nothing about German, you know, except a translation of the "Sorrows of Werther," which I thought very funny.'

'And I do not know much about English,' said Hugo, much delighted with his own good fortune, 'but I can understand yours, *sehr gut*—I mean, very well. You speak so clearly—it is different from the London people.'

'Not bad for a first attempt, old boy!' thought Sebastian, smiling, as they entered the celebrated dining-room of Castle Hill, with its pictures and bronzes, and statuary, all of the very best, and 'bought by people who understood such things,' as Mr. Spenceley was wont modestly to say, when any one praised any of his artistic treasures.

Mrs. Spenceley did not look like a person who would have exactly a discriminating

taste in the matter of genre-paintings, or landscape, but Sebastian broke the silence between them by remarking on a little picture hanging opposite to him.

'Yes; it's by a person called Ansdell, I believe,' said Mrs. Spenceley. 'They say it's very good; but for my part I'm no judge of such things.'

Sebastian bowed, and then, thinking that perhaps local topics might prove more successful than artistic ones, said he feared that distress was already beginning amongst the work-people.

Mrs. Spenceley turned with some vivacity to her guest.

'You're right, Mr. Mallory. If it goes on as it is doing it'll break some 'earts before all's over.'

'Do you visit much amongst them?'

'Not so much as I could wish. There's some of the poor creatures will soon be fair clemming—starving, I mean.' Mrs. Spenceley sank her voice, and every now and then her

eye turned with a little nervous, wavering glance towards her lord at the other end of the table. 'You see, I shouldn't like to go amongst them so much without I could keep them a bit. I *should* like to have a soup-kitchen!' she added with feeling; 'but Spenceley doesn't quite approve of it. He says that many of them have money laid by, and he's of opinion that we must let them help themselves a bit before we begin to help them.'

'From a politico-economical point of view Mr. Spenceley is perhaps right,' said Sebastian, glancing down the table at the red-faced, coarse-featured man, with the heavy jaw not devoid of cruelty; and noting that same jaw reproduced even more obtrusively and unpleasantly in the son; scarcely at all in the daughter, or at least only in a manner which gave an expression of decision to the charming mouth.

'I know nothing about politics,' said Mrs. Spenceley; 'and you may mark my words—

those that's starving will want bread—not politics.'

'Certainly they will. Unfortunately you often cannot give them the one without a good deal of the other.'

'I dare say. But if the war doesn't stop soon we shall have to do something, if it was only to try and teach the poor women to make the most of their bits of stuff. Most of them are no housekeepers to speak of. They can spin and weave, but they can't make home comfortable, and after all that's the chief thing. But,' she added, suddenly remembering different reports she had heard of Sebastian, and Helena's contemptuous announcement that he was a fop, who thought the world was made for his amusement, and that there was nothing in life worth the trouble of being earnest about, 'you won't be much interested in these kind of things, Mr. Mallory.'

'On the contrary, I am much interested in it. Your idea makes me wonder if some-

thing could not be done. If some schools, or something of that kind, could be established,* if some of the ladies of the town would take it up—my mother and you, for example, Mrs. Spenceley—and make it unnecessary for those poor girls to be wandering about, laughing and making fun of people in the streets, as I saw them the other day. And your daughter—I should think Miss Spenceley would find the work congenial.'

'Helena!' echoed the mother, shaking her head. 'It's of no use talking about her, Mr. Mallory. She has always some fresh craze in her head, and never a useful one. That horrid Miss Mereweather has been the ruin of her.'

Sebastian repressed a smile.

'If she only would turn to something

* An apology is herewith offered to the Manchester Central Committee for thus putting into the mouth of a single individual their excellent proposal for the schools which were of so much benefit in most of the distressed districts.

useful!' lamented Mrs. Spenceley, 'but with these ridiculous ideas about women being better than men, and all that—and she can't even make a shirt for her father or a pudding for her brother. Oh, but I beg your pardon—only I do often tell her that she would never make a good wife with these ideas—not if she had millions of pounds and was the prettiest girl in England.'

Though Mrs. Spenceley threw back her head and spoke in a tone of annoyance, yet Sebastian clearly distinguished an accent of pride in her voice. The homely mother then was not altogether displeased with her wilful, brilliant girl.

'And what does she say to that?' he asked, looking at Hugo and Helena, who seemed to be greatly enjoying some remarkably good joke; and he thought: 'The prettiest girl in England! At least she might hold her own amongst a dozen of the prettiest.'

'Oh, she says she never will be married,

and all that nonsense. I tell her to wait until Mr. Right comes, and then we shall hear a different song. I wish he would, I'm sure,' she added fervently, 'before she gets spoiled. She has a right good heart, has Helena, if only a giddy head.'

Sebastian did not answer. He was still looking towards Hugo and Helena, and felt intensely conscious of the ripple of laughter which scarcely ceased between them. It was impossible that women's rights, or any such bristly, hateful topic could be causing that delighted look on Hugo's dark, artist face; could call that gracious curve to Helena's red lips. Hugo threw himself with passion into the joy of the moment, as Sebastian knew: Helena seemed to have something of his eager, inflammable temperament. At least they appeared to be very happy together.

* * * * *

Dinner over; a group of four, congregated

in a corner. Helena on a sofa, with Hugo beside her: Sebastian and Miss Mereweather facing one another in chairs, and the cross-examination about to begin. Helena had wished to leave Sebastian and Miss Mereweather to fight it out alone, but he had meekly suggested that it was not fair to make him confront the most remarkable woman of her age entirely without support; and Hugo adding his petition, Helena had consented to be present at the discussion.

Helena seated herself, opened her fan, and said:

'Now, Laura dear, Mr. Mallory would like to know your views on the Woman Question.'

She avoided meeting the look of sorrowful amazement and reproach with which Sebastian heard this decidedly exaggerated announcement, and Laura replied:

'I should first wish to know Mr. Mallory's own views upon that subject—*the* subject, I may say, of the present age.'

'They are soon stated,' said Sebastian. 'I have none.'

'Then there is some hope for you,' said Miss Mereweather, with rather a pitying smile.

'I am glad of that. At the same time, I should like to know in which direction the hope shows itself.'

'Your frank acknowledgment of your utter ignorance of the question is a great point in your favour. As you have no views at all upon it, you are the more likely to be able to receive just ones when they are offered to you.'

'I have some preconceived ideas upon the matter of logic and reasonableness, common-sense, and all that kind of thing. Will that be against me in this case, do you think?'

'I dislike flippancy,' said Laura.

'I did not mean to be flippant. I merely wished for information.'

'We will take the suffrage first,' said Miss Mereweather, raising her voice somewhat, as

if to scatter such irrelevant remarks to the winds. 'Are you in favour of extending the franchise to women. I mean women-householders and rate-payers?'

'On what grounds?'

'On the only grounds on which they can claim it; on the grounds that they are mentally, morally, and in the practical affairs of the world, the equal of man; and that, as they bear equal burdens for the State, so they should have equal privileges.'

'I could never grant them the suffrage on those grounds.'

'*What!*' exclaimed both ladies, while Helena started forward, and dropped her fan, her eyes flashing and her face flushing.

'Because it would take too long to prove your case. What is more, if you fight the question on that ground, I doubt whether you will ever win it. You cannot be said to have proved a case to your opponent until you have got him to agree with you, and you

will never, in your lifetime at least, get more than a number to agree with you on that point; it may be an influential number, and a select one, but it will not be at all a majority.'

'Your argument is not logical, it is a quibble,' said Miss Mereweather disdainfully. 'Your real opinion is that women ought not to have the franchise.'

'I never said so. If they think it a privilege, and if they would be pleased to have it, why not?'

Miss Mereweather, unaccustomed to this style, neither agreement nor opposition, was silent a moment. Then a shade of pique crossed her brow.

'You do not think women worth discussing anything seriously with?' said she.

'Excuse my saying that you are quite mistaken.'

'Then why don't you discuss this question seriously?' was the decidedly feeble reply of the most remarkable woman of her time.

'But I do. I say, why not give them the franchise if they would like to have it? I suppose that by degrees they would get educated up to it.'

'Mr. Mallory! you are absolutely insulting,' cried Helena angrily; and Sebastian merely answered with a grave look, and the remark:

'I am sorry if I have offended you.'

Helena's lips, opened to utter further reproach, suddenly closed; with a look of embarrassment she became silent, and Miss Mereweather, in a business-like tone, said:

'Mr. Mallory is not so dark as he seems to you, my dear. I have good hopes for him. We will turn to another branch of the subject. What is your opinion, Mr. Mallory, of the relative status before the law, of husband and wife? What do you think of the laws about married women's property?'

'I think they are bad,' said Sebastian, stifling a yawn, and glancing at Hugo, who was fanning himself with Helena's fan, while she leaned eagerly forward.

'Ah!' said Laura, 'an opinion at last! You agree with us that there, in that most important of all relations, the woman is a slave.'

'I don't think I said so. I suppose the woman might be a slave if every husband were as bad as the law would allow him to be. Men are not all tyrants, nor women all slaves; so I suppose that is why the law has not been changed.'

'That is sophistry,' said Laura.

'Will you deny that it is fact?' he inquired politely.

'Then you would allow the law to be altered?'

'Certainly.'

'It is an important subject for you, my dear child,' said Miss Mereweather to Helena. 'I only hope your resolution will remain firm, and that you will resist temptation and specious promises. In your case you will have plenty of both.'

'Of course I shall resist,' said Helena, a

little crossly. 'I am not quite imbecile, Laura, and know how to take care of myself. My mind is quite made up on that subject.

'In what direction?' inquired Sebastian.

'I have told you already. I know I shall have property,' said Helena, trying to speak with lofty indifference, but, all the same, not unaware that the young man's eyes were fixed upon her face, and with her own wavering as she went on with the speech which she had uttered many a time before, and which now struck her for the first time as falling somewhat flat, and not being quite equal to the occasion. Other young men had looked at her, and said they were sure she didn't mean it, and it was too cruel of her, and other 'vacant chaff' of the same description. Sebastian only looked at her, gravely, calmly, as it seemed to her, almost pityingly, and in perfect silence.

The glance stung and galled her. She would not be deterred by that look. What was Sebastian Mallory, but a man — a

thoughtless young man who had dared to laugh at her views?

'And property entails responsibilities,' she continued.

'It certainly does.'

'I shall therefore never marry,' said Helena courageously, though her face burned, and she wished intensely that she had never insisted upon the discussion. 'I shall look after my own affairs, and arrange them according to my own judgment. I will be free, and nobody's servant.'

'A very wise resolution; provided, first, that you keep it; and second, that you feel equal to disposing judiciously of a large property.'

'I have no doubt about *that*,' said she, with a lofty smile, still not raising her eyes, and very angry with herself for not being able to do so.

Sebastian smiled, and the smile made Helena feel hot and uncomfortable.

'I hope,' said he, with extreme politeness,

'that you will feel the satisfaction which should be the reward of such high motives.'

Helena flushed again. She had argued the point more than once with different people, and without this feeling of embarrassment. Why was she embarrassed now? What would that 'nicest girl' he ever knew think, if she were here? Had she money? He had said she had been brought up in the school of adversity. That reminded Helena of another point in the argument, which she ought to have advanced long ago. She was dimly conscious of a kind of bathos, as she said:

'I don't believe in useless fine ladies, you know, all the same. I think women ought to be able to earn their own living if necessary. They ought to be able to be quite independent of men, if they choose.'

'Do you think they ever would choose?' he asked, with a suppressed smile.

'I know this, that I would rather earn fourpence a day as a needle-woman, than de-

pend upon any man!' said Helena, hotly and indignantly. 'And I could always do that.'

'In that case I congratulate you,' he retorted ironically. 'You are superior to all calamities and misfortunes. I wish I could feel myself equally secure.'

'You have not argued a single point,' said Helena, with passion. 'I shall never be at the trouble to talk seriously to you again.'

'If you will only talk to me at all, I shall be delighted.'

She had risen, and whirled herself away to the other end of the room, where she busied herself in setting two young ladies to screech duets, while she conversed (seriously or otherwise) with the clergyman.

Sebastian turned with a half smile to Miss Mereweather. He found an unaccountable pleasure in goading Helena into a passion. He had a dim, vague idea that if he tried, he could not only irritate her into fury, but soothe her back into calmness; but he was quite sure he never would try. Rages, he

thought, were not in his line. He liked better, as a permanency, the perfect temper and calm self-possession of another character. No one would want to tease Adrienne.

His mind half given to such thoughts, he conversed with Miss Mereweather, and his opinion of Helena's discrimination was gradually raised. Miss Mereweather was not at all bitter about her defeat—if defeat it were. She was clever, sensible, accomplished. She owned that she did think a great deal about the advancement of women and their improvement, and she was an ardent advocate for giving them the franchise; but, she added, she could not go to the lengths Helena did, and very soon they left that subject and turned to others. Their conversation was perfectly amicable and agreeable, and Helena watched them from afar, with a darkling, somewhat resentful glance. Dear Laura's one fault, she thought, was that she was too facile—that she compromised too easily.

As the Mallorys drove home, Mrs. Mallory, completely deceived by the long conversation which had taken place, was in a disastrously, unsuspiciously amiable frame of mind, and was correspondingly dejected when Sebastian, summing up his description of the evening's entertainment, said that Miss Spenceley had adopted the strictly feminine line of argument, 'Agree with all I say, or I will quarrel with you!'

'As I did not agree with all she said, she quarrelled with me. *Voilà tout!* Did she talk women's rights to you, Hugo?'

'To me—no!'

'Why *I* should be selected as the victim, I can't imagine,' pursued Sebastian. 'It is a pity she does it, for she could be nice, I am sure; and as it is, she makes herself simply a bore.'

Mrs. Mallory was silent, mentally heaping opprobrium upon Helena's crazes.

END OF BOOK I.

BOOK II.

THE STORM.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST OF THE STORM.

THE year 1861 had closed in thick clouds and a great darkness, with the mutter of war in the far west, and with the threatening of famine at home. The year 1862 dawned, but with a dawn so dark as scarce to be distinguishable from profoundest midnight.

'Earth turned in her sleep for pain.'

January, February, dragged slowly by, and times only grew worse. Few chimneys smoked, no workers tramped through the streets; faces were pinched, fires burnt low, and meagre in the bitter weather; money was not forthcoming, clothes were few, pleasures were at an end. Men paused and waited, as it were, while the thunder growled and the first heavy drops of the storm began to fall, slowly and deliberately, and then faster and ever faster, till none could escape the universal drenching.

One bitter morning, in the beginning of March, Myles and Mary Heywood turned out to their daily work. A furious, stinging wind, and a driving, scourging rain, saluted them as they entered the long sloping street leading to the factory. Myles pulled his collar up about his ears, and Mary folded her shawl more tightly round her, pulling it also further over her face. They walked in silence, and did not look at each other. In truth, both their hearts were sad as sad could

be. They were entirely changed from the well-to-do, untroubled, noble-looking brother and sister who, six or seven months ago, walked home together in the heat of the August afternoon. What a hot, plentiful blaze of sunlight then! what cold, what wet, what inclemency of elements now! The contrast was pointed and searching, and went home to both.

For months now, Myles's heart had been growing bitterer and harder, and more rebellious; ever since that evening on which Sebastian Mallory had come and interrupted his talk with Adrienne. He had not seen her often since then, or rather had not visited her often since then; but on the few occasions when he had done so, she was changed. He had seen the change distinctly, had seen how her eye wavered and her colour changed under his piercing glance, for he could look at her steadily enough now, without bashfulness, and with a gaze of desperate, hopeless inquiry, which, he thought, must burn her

secret from her heart. With each visit, each conversation with her, he had grown more hopeless, more despairingly certain that what little part or lot he had ever had in her life, had now vanished—was done with for evermore. Once, strolling aimlessly along, he had seen her come out of a shop, and had been going to speak to her, when Sebastian Mallory had come up, smiling, and lifting his hat, and fixing his eyes upon her face.

The sight had been quite enough for Myles, who had plunged his hands into his pockets, and turned away with bitterness in his heart. Once or twice—he did not know how often—he had purposely and pointedly spoken to her of Sebastian, and had even asked her a question or two about her former acquaintance with him, and had watched, cruelly and unflinchingly, to see how she took it. And she had taken it just as he had expected, with downcast eyes, a heightened colour, and a sudden confused silence. He had been satisfied with his experiment; now he had

given over going to Mr. Blisset's house, saying to himself:

'If she cares for us, and is worth anything, she will come—she will come if it is only to see Mary. By this I shall know her. If she comes, I'll keep quiet, and try to be satisfied with her—friendship. And if she does not come—I'll hate her; no, I'll think no more of her—I'll forget her, and rid myself of this plague that has been with me ever since I knew her.'

Adrienne did not come, days and weeks went by, and she came not, and Myles did not hate her; he did not cease to think of her. His 'plague' tormented him more grievously than ever, and his life was miserable. His days were long; there was only half the usual work to fill them. The weary afternoons and evenings were unutterably long. He sat at home with his books open before him, or he took his way to the reading-room, and sat with more books open before him, and stared at them, and knew nothing about what

was in them, while the chimes played 'Life let us cherish!' and Myles thought of the hundreds, now daily augmenting, dwelling in the houses beneath those chimes, to whom, in their destitution, the tune must have seemed a sort of melodious mockery. 'Life let us cherish!' while the men across the Atlantic were locked in the deadly grip of war, and the cotton manufacture in England was coming steadily, surely, to a standstill. A few more throbs of its mighty pulse—a few more desperate struggles to break through the paralysis that was creeping over it, and then the iron lungs, the great throbbing heart of it, its huge limbs, its vast arteries would be quiescent for—who should venture to say how long? It was a deadly prospect.

With these various causes of distress gnawing perseveringly at his heart, the young man might well be silent, as he set his teeth against the wind, and stooped his head to shield his face from the rain.

While Mary, on her side, had cause enough and to spare of unhappiness. The poor girl's heart was full to bursting of a dread fear that she had had for many weeks now, and concerning which she had not breathed a word to any one.

'That it should ha' begun just now!' she thought to herself; 'just when times is hard, and work is short, and I can none get him all he should have.'

She kept up a brave face; worked out her daily task at her looms, and her much harder, heart-breaking task at home; had caresses, and smiles, and tender words for Edmund, and a good face to turn to poor Myles, in his gloom, which oppressed her faithful heart like a chill hand laid upon it. She had her meed of consolation for Harry Ashworth, who said he was growing deafer and deafer. She had her own private astonishment at Adrienne's long absence, but no thought that Adrienne meant any slight or ill-will to her or hers.

Still, her secret cares had thinned her cheeks, and taught her lips to assume a sadder curve: had placed a line or two upon her frank, calm brow, and lent a quiet pensiveness to her dark-brown eyes. It had always been a good face — now it had the dignity and pathos of well-borne sorrow.

They entered the great, gas-lighted room. Myles went off to his part of the mill, and Mary to hers. How hot and overpowering it felt, after the bitter rawness of the outside air! She cast aside her shawl, and set her looms going, and in a few minutes the old accustomed roar of the machinery had somewhat soothed her; and her monotonous, weary pondering over ways and means, and sharp, stinging fears as to some dread event hovering in the near future, had been somewhat dissipated by attention to her work, and the chat of a fellow factory-worker.

'I reckon we'st soon have to shut up shop here, Mary,' said the latter. 'I yeard

Wilson say as how we couldn't hold out mich longer.'

'Eh, what?' said Mary, with a start, 'eh, I hope not, lass. What mun we do, if we've no work?'

The other girl shrugged her shoulders.

'I've yeard say, too, as if we do have any work, it 'll be wi' Surats, and I mun say, I'd raythe have none at all. I conno' work yon stuff.'

'I care nowt at all, whether it's Surats, or what it is, so as I've summat to do, and summat to earn,' said Mary.

'Thou may work twelve hours a day at Surats, and not earn above six shillin' a week,' said her companion cynically; and then the conversation ceased, and Mary was left to her reflections.

At eight they went home to breakfast, and at half-past they were at their work again, and continued at it until half-past twelve when Wilson put his head into the room, and called out:

'All the hands in this here room will please wait a few minutes in the big yard. I've got something to say to you.'

The same announcement had been made in the different rooms, and the result was, all the hands were assembled, and waiting, some curiously, some apathetically, for the communication that was coming.

Wilson jumped upon a lurry which stood in the yard, and in a clear, distinct voice, read out from a paper he held in his hand, this announcement:

'I hereby give notice that on and after Friday, March the—th, this factory will be closed, owing to the present condition of the cotton trade, in consequence of the American war. At the same time, as I am anxious to keep my hands together, and to save them as much as possible from distress, I undertake, for the present at least, and until other circumstcanes should make a change desirable, to furnish them with the means of subsistence,

and such of them as are my tenants will not be pressed for rent until the times improve. Each head of a family is requested to attend in the warehouse of this mill on the afternoon of Monday next, at three o'clock, when the conditions of relief will be made known, and the names and addresses of all in receipt thereof taken down. I request you earnestly, and with perfect confidence, to try, all of you, during this present trouble, to act together, and assist me in the preservation of order, and the relief of distress.

'SEBASTIAN MALLORY.'

There was a short silence; then murmurs; then, from some lips, an attempt at a cheer. Some girls and women were wiping their eyes with their aprons, and one or two men waved their hats; exclamations and murmurs arose all around. 'Eh, but that's reet down kind, that is!' 'Th' chap is a good sort!' 'Well, we need na fear to clem just yet!' and so on. The gratitude was very real, if ex-

pressed with true Lancashire reticence and absence of effusion. But almost greater than the gratitude was the gloom—the sense of shame and degradation—the feeling that this was a draught too bitter for any amount of sugaring to sweeten, and that they had done nothing to deserve to have to swallow it. Sebastian had done wisely in committing to Wilson the delivery of the message. Wilson seemed to the work-people almost as one of themselves; he, too, must suffer somewhat from this calamity. The humiliation would have been too intense had Sebastian read the announcement himself. He, like hundreds of other masters, was making money—netting large profits at this stage of the crisis. His piled-up warehouses would be emptied at profitable prices of the accumulated results of last year's over-production, while the impossibility of getting at the stores of cotton which were undoubtedly reposing in large quantities in Manchester and Liverpool warehouses, relieved him from

the immediate expense of working, and of paying wages. That part of the 'panic' as it was and is always called by the work-people, was one of unmitigated severity for the poor man — for the worker — capital added hugely to her stores. Yet every employer of any foresight was troubled to know what was to become of his work-people during the great distress — such skilful, practised, deft-handed, soft-fingered work-people as no other corner of the world could supply to him—work-people who, if they once got scattered, or emigrated, or separated from their labour, could not be replaced—the choicest of craftsmen and craftswomen. This was a hard subject during all the years of the cotton famine. How keep the operatives together, provide for them, prevent them from becoming demoralised by the enforced idleness, combined with the living on money not earned by themselves? It was a problem which, all must confess, was nobly solved.

At this precise time, though the distress

was daily augmenting in an appalling manner, though each week saw a greater number of factories closed entirely, yet the organised system of relief—that gigantic machinery whose equal the world had never before seen—was not yet in existence.

Sebastian, after long consultations with Mr. Sutcliffe, had come to the conclusion, for the present at least, to support his own work-people, and the result of that resolution was the paper just now read out by Wilson.

Slowly the hands dispersed. Mary Heywood, seeing her brother near the big gate, joined him there, and glanced rather doubtfully up into his face. Doubt rapidly changed to dismay: he was white as death; his lips tight-set; his great dark eyes absolutely scintillating with passion. The words she had been about to speak to him died upon her lips.

'Thou go home, lass! I've a little business to do before I come after thee, but I'll not be long,' said he, so quietly and calmly that her

heart beat a little less rapidly, and without a word she obeyed, leaving him there in the yard, he conscious only of one purpose, and of a burning restlessness until that purpose should be accomplished.

He waited by the gates, looking at no one, speaking to no one, until he saw that all the hands had filed out, and that Wilson was left alone in the office, locking things up. A few swift, striding steps, brought him inside the little room. Wilson looked up.

'Hey, Myles! Is that you? Do you want something?'

'Yes. I just want to tell you to take my name—and my sister's too—off the books. We shall not work here any more.'

'Oh! but you will. This here is only a temporary stoppage, you know. Times must mend, though they look bad enough now, and Mallory's won't go to smash so easily.'

'I shall never work here again, I tell you, nor Mary neither. Take our names off the books, if you please; and look you, Wilson,

if anybody comes round to my house offering me relief in—' a spasm twitched his pain-set lips—'the master's name, I'll kick him out—so you're warned.'

'My certy, Myles! You're mad to talk i' that way. You've ne'er thought about it. How are you to live without relief? And when such a handsome arrangement has been made——'

'That's nothing to the point. Please to do as I ask, and remember, I'll keep my word.'

He turned on his heel and left the yard. Wilson looked after him, watching the proud, elastic figure, haunted by the remembrance of the deadly paleness of the face, and the sombre, despairing gloom of the eyes.

Wilson acted as became a wary man, who did not choose to commit himself—shook his head, and murmured:

'Ay, ay, my good chap, but you'll have to eat humble-pie sooner or later—and why not sooner?'

Evidently, the characters of Myles and his easy-going old friend were fundamentally unlike.

Meantime Myles, breathing rather more freely, and with a faint return of colour to his cheek, took his way home, feeling that now, if he met Sebastian Mallory, he could look him in the face as defiantly as he chose. There was something almost exquisite in the sense that, though only a few pounds stood between him and destitution, yet that he was no longer in any way dependent upon Mallory.

Arrived at home, he found the kitchen empty; the dinner half ready (not such an abundant dinner, even now, as it once had been), the table spread. He sat down moodily, and waited; and presently Mary came down, looking very sad indeed. She had not been crying, but there was something in her eyes speaking of a grief and fear beyond tears.

'Well, my lass, where's Edmund?'

'Edmund's in bed, Myles.'

'In bed!' he echoed, looking up in some surprise; 'why, what ails him?'

'The same thing as has been ailin' him this six-week. I dunnot know what it may be. Th' doctor calls it low fever.'

'The doctor!' he echoed again, more astonished still. 'What's the meaning of this, Molly?'

'Eh, Myles, if thou'd none been so wrapped up in summat all this time, thou might ha' seen as th' lad were fair pinin' away.'

She could hardly finish her words, but sat down upon the rocking-chair, and covered her face with her hands for a moment, while he looked at her with a haggard gaze. A hundred trifles came into his mind now, crowding quickly forward—Mary's preoccupation—Edmund's passive silence and flushed face—and he had never seen it. Brute that he was!

'And to-day he's that weak, he can't sit up no longer,' continued Mary, raising her

face from her hands and looking sadly before her; 'and I'm sore fleyed he'll ne'er be strong again, that I am.'

Then she rose, and began to finish the few preparations for dinner, though, sooth to say, no two people ever made ready for a meal with less appetite. She began to talk, as she thought, cheerfully.

'When I heard Wilson read out as factory would stop o' Friday, my heart fair sank within me, when I thowt o' yon lad, and us wi'out a penny to earn, but, eh! I could ha' cried wi' joy afore he'd done. Yon Mr. Mallory mun be a reet good-hearted chap, and our Edmund winnot clem now.'

'Mary!' he exclaimed, starting up, and speaking in so strange a voice that she looked at him involuntarily, and saw again the look—the pale face, the scintillating eyes—which had so terrified her an hour before, at the mill-gate. He stepped across the room to her, and grasped her arm. 'Never thou name such a thing again. I told

Wilson to take my name, and thy name, off the books, and to send anybody round here, poking into my affairs, if he dared. I'd die like a dog before I'd take bit or sup from *him*, or let any of those that belonged to me do it.'

'Why, whatever——' she began, but he went on, forcibly moderating his voice:

'Molly, I never could have thought to hear such a word from thee. Hast thought what it means? It means that we—seven hundred and more of us — shall go like beggars every day, and take that man's money, and eat his bread, and do nothing for it. Thou'rt mazed with thy trouble,' he added soothingly, 'or thou'd never have dreamt of it.'

'But how mun we live?' she asked, seeing only that they were Mr. Mallory's work-people, and that he prized their services, and like a generous master desired to help them until better times came round again. 'Thou wert always so set against th' master, lad;

but when we're like to starve, what mun we do ?'

Neither Mary nor Myles, it may have been observed, made any mention of their mother, or spoke as if she could relieve them. Later in the distress, Mary went to her mother, and represented their situation. Mrs. Hoyle replied sententiously that her money was sunk in her husband's business, and she had no longer any control over it, which was indeed true: she had put it entirely in his power immediately after marrying him, and it remained there, for towards the close of 1863, Mrs. Hoyle, who had believed that she was doing well for herself in her marriage, died, of a rapid, sudden illness, and her money passed away from her children, and into her husband's hands for ever.

'We're not like to starve yet,' replied Myles, to his sister's last remark. 'I've got over ten pounds put by—it ought to have been more, but I wasn't as careful as I

should have been; and you've something of your own, I know. It's true, we'd meant to keep it, but in these times we'll most of us have to use up what we put by.'

'Eh, lad!' answered Mary, with sorrowful embarrassment. 'Mine were such a bit! And I've drawn it all out, for to buy yon lad his bits of things as he must have. Doctor ordered them, and I saw as thou were moithered wi' summat, so I didn't ax thee, but just used up my own bit o' brass. It's all gone—all but a few shillin's.'

He dropped her arm, and turned aside. This then was the prospect—a sick brother to cherish, himself and his sister to support; the rent to pay; and a little over ten pounds between them and destitution. Undaunted though his spirit was, it was fain to stand appalled before these facts, until at last, turning round, he said:

'I'll think about what can be done, Mary. Ten pounds will last a good while, and thou'rt so clever at managing, and all that.'

Mary was silent. She knew how quickly ten pounds would vanish, where there was an invalid to be cared for; and the regular weekly sum which Myles had haughtily refused, seemed, now that it was out of her reach, to assume the proportions of absolute wealth.

'Myles,' she said, 'I know thou mun have some reason for what thou'rt doing, but *I've* no grudge against the master. I don't see why I shouldn't take the relief and help Ned a bit . . . thou needna know nowt about it.'

'Mary!' He paused, choked back some passionate emotion, and looked at her. There rushed over his mind, as by an inspiration, the conviction that what he had said, what he had proposed to do, was a mean, tyrannical way of making others suffer for his own private grudge. Mary's mind was to be kept on the rack as to ways and means. Edmund's comforts were to be stinted, or stopped, because he, Myles, hated Sebastian

Mallory, and, knowing his sister would obey him, despotically said, 'You will take no help from him.'

Certainly, to know that Mary and Edmund were subsisting upon Mr. Mallory's bounty, while he was idle, would be anguish almost as keen as to sit down and subsist upon that bounty himself; but anguish, it seemed, prevailed a good deal in the world. It had to be borne by some people—what right had he to shift his portion upon the shoulders of a loving woman and a cripple boy? He cried shame upon himself. His cheek flushed, and he hesitated no longer. He had begun to speak passionately; he finished calmly.

'I had not thought of that. You are right, Molly. You'd better do so. It will be bad for me to bear' (how bad, his pale face and drawn lips foretold), 'but it's best so. This is a great trouble that has come upon us, and we must be as great as we can to meet it, I suppose. I shall look out and see

if I can find anything to do—perhaps away from here. I'm sure it's the best thing I could do. It's a great mistake my being here at all.'

This speech, with the misery and bitterness underlying its acquiescence in her wish, seemed to freeze Mary's heart within her. She could not understand it, yet it seemed to forebode evil and misery and woe to her. She looked at Myles, in whose whole attitude was something alien and strange. For a moment a fearful weight and foreboding oppressed her; then, breaking suddenly loose from it, she ran up to him with a cry of love; flung her arms around his neck, and kissed him eagerly.

'Eh, Myles, hush, hush! Thou munnot talk like that. I'd clem sooner nor take a penny from any one thou didn't like. It were only that I were quite disheartened, like, wi' wondering what I were to do in these hard times, now yon lad is so poorly. But for thee to go away and leave us—the

best brother'—a hug—'ay, the vary best, ever a lass had—my certy, don't say nowt about it again.'

She was half laughing, half crying. As for Myles, the clasp of her warm arms about his neck, seemed to unstiffen it; the pressure of her face upon his breast appeared to loosen a load of pent-up feeling. He put his arm round her waist, and kissed her soft brown hair again and again, and once more the feeling rushed over him, that this was true hearty love, and that he was a fool to distress himself for that other love, which would never be his.

'Don't take on so, there's a dear lass. Do just as you like about the relief. Say nothing to me about it, and I shall know nothing about it. There's a reason why I can take neither bit nor sup from young Mallory—a reason I can't tell you, and that will never be removed. A crumb of his bread would choke me.'

'Why, has he done thee any wrong?'

'None at all, and means me no wrong; it's what they call circumstances, Molly. They come rather hard upon a fellow sometimes, that's all. Come! the dinner must be well-nigh cold. Let's have it, and then I'll go up and sit wi' poor Ned a bit.'

It was a dark prospect which opened before them; yet, after this conversation, they both felt lighter of heart, and better prepared to meet it.

CHAPTER II.

'RATHE SCHLAGEN.'

SEBASTIAN MALLORY, Mr. Sutcliffe, and Wilson, holding a council of war together, late in the afternoon of that eventful day, discussed the means to be taken for the preservation of order, and the best distribution of relief.

Sebastian, in the course of the debate, asked how many exactly there were to be relieved.

Wilson ran his eye over some long lists of names and addresses.

'The number of hands is seven hundred

and thirty, sir, all in all; but it's with the heads of families we shall have to deal. About a dozen won't require relief, and four have taken their names off the books altogether.'

'Which are they?' asked Sebastian.

'Frank Mitchell, weaver; he's got a brother in Canada, who offered to pay his passage out if he'll go and help him on his farm; so as soon as he heard work was stopped, he decided to go. That's one. Myles and Mary Heywood——'

'What! Any reasons given for their leaving?' asked Sebastian quickly.

'Well, sir, relief would be a hard nut for Myles Heywood to crack, at the best of times. He's uncommon proud, and he came up to me, after I'd read your notice, and told me very stiff indeed to take his name and his sister's off the books. I did hexpostulate with him, but he were quite determined.'

'Did he give any reasons?'

'No, sir. He doesn't generally give his

reasons for what he does, leastways not to me ; but I'm not his master.'

'Is he one of my tenants ?'

'No, sir. He lives on the Townfield, at Number 16.'

'Oh, very well !' said Sebastian, and the business went on for some time uninterruptedly.

In the evening, Sebastian, calling at Stonegate, and asking if Miss Blisset could see him, was admitted, and taken to the drawing-room, where he found Adrienne alone, seated at her piano. She rose, coming forward to greet him, and he saw that her face was pale, and her eyes sad and heavy.

'I hope you are in a good-natured and self-sacrificing mood,' said he, 'for I am come to ask a very great favour.'

'I shall be delighted if I can help you in any way.'

'Did you know we cease to work at all after Friday ?'

'Cease to work at all ! What will become

—oh, I am very sorry—what will the work-people do?'

'I thought,' began Sebastian, and bit his lips.

He was afraid of appearing to parade his intentions before her, and altered the form of his announcement.

'I have consulted with Sutcliffe, my manager, you know, and we have come to the conclusion that it will be the best and wisest plan for me to relieve my work-people myself, for the present at any rate, and——'

'All of them! To keep them, do you mean?' asked Adrienne quickly.

'It is really the best, and it will be the cheapest way in the end,' said he, half apologetically, 'and what I wished to ask you, was——'

'It is right—it is a generous thing to do. I am glad you are going to do it,' she interrupted him, her eyes beaming, and suppressed warmth in her tone.

And she looked at him more fully and steadily than she had done for many weeks past. Yet there was something not perfectly pleased in her expression.

Sebastian, a young man who was not usually given to losing his self-possession or presence of mind, coloured, half with embarrassment, half with pleasure.

'I am glad you approve,' was all he could find to say.

'I do. It will be such an excellent example.'

'An example—ah, yes! But now to ask my favour. Sutcliffe thinks it will not do to let them be idle all the time, so we have decided to open some schools—one for the men and boys, and another for the women and girls. Both of them will require some one with brains and a head on their shoulders to look after them. I want to know if you will take the management of the women's school?'

'But Mrs. Mallory—will she not wish to——'

'No. She will have nothing to do with it, beyond giving me a subscription. I believe she does not altogether approve of the course I have taken, and has decided to hold herself aloof. You can do it, if you will, and if Mr. Blisset will spare you. I know you are not afraid of yourself, and that is why I asked you.'

'If my uncle can spare me I will undertake it,' said Adrienne, speaking as she now usually did speak to him—rather briefly and dryly.

Sebastian could wring no sign from her—nothing but a rapid, guarded glance, and a brief, unemotional speech. It was unsatisfactory, he felt. He was not making way. She tormented his thoughts sometimes in a way that was harassing; he carried in his mind almost incessantly the calm, sweet face, pale and clear; the rapid glance which was, he felt, not so much destitute of expression as full of something veiled—something which she would not allow to beam fully out upon him.

'It will not be play,' he proceeded, after a silent pause, during which his eyes interrogated hers, which made no answer. 'It will be downright hard, arduous work. If it should prove to be too much for you . . .'

'It will not be too much for me,' she said quickly, and then her eyes did suddenly fill with some expression—what, he could not tell. 'I want some work like that—work which will be hard and absorbing,' said Adrienne, clasping her hands with an involuntary movement. 'What must I do? Have you got a room for the school, and some teachers?'

'I think of dividing part of my warehouse, and filling it with benches. It can soon be done. As for teachers, I thought some of the better-educated amongst the young women themselves, or I could find a mistress, and—do you know Miss Spenceley?'

'No, I do not,' said Adrienne steadily her colour rising.

'She is a young lady who professes to

need active work and to love it, and I really think, if she had the opportunity, she would throw herself heart and soul into such a scheme. But perhaps you would rather not make her acquaintance ?'

Adrienne paused again. Was she to extend the scorn and contempt she felt for Frederick Spenceley to his whole connections, and to make difficulties and quibbles about her co-workers in a scheme in which it was essential chiefly to have workers as soon as possible ?

'No,' said she; 'if you think Miss Spenceley would help, I shall be very happy to work with her.'

'Of course you will be the head,' said Sebastian. 'I will take care that is understood, and then there will be no difficulty.'

'If you will send me a list of names and addresses,' said Adrienne, 'I will go myself, and see after them. I dare say Mary Heywood could tell me something about a good many of them.'

'That reminds me that Myles Heywood, for some reason or other, has seen fit to decline all assistance. He has ordered his own name and his sister's to be taken off my books, and withdraws in dignified silence.'

He looked intently at Adrienne as he spoke. She was silent, crimsoned for a moment as she met his glance; then she started from her chair and walked to the fireplace, stooped over the fire-irons, and began to mend the fire.

'Allow me!' said Sebastian politely, coming to her assistance in time to see her disturbed face. 'Is it not foolish of him?' he added remorselessly. 'He is too young to have been able to save anything almost, and there is not the least prospect of work at present.'

'He was quite right,' said Adrienne clearly, as she fixed her eyes upon Sebastian.

'Quite right?' he echoed, holding the

poker suspended in his hand, and looking at her in his turn.

'Perfectly right. I am thankful to hear it. If he had stooped tamely to accept charity from you—I mean from any one—as soon as it was offered, I—I would never have forgiven him.'

Sebastian gently replaced the poker in the fender.

'Perhaps he knew that,' he remarked in his softest tone.

'He could not,' was Adrienne's quick retort. 'I have not spoken to him for weeks. And if I had—if he had known it . . .'

'He might know it perfectly well, all the same,' insisted Sebastian. 'Have you thought seriously about it, Miss Blisset? I know Heywood is a friend of yours . . .'

'Yes, he is—a great friend of mine,' she answered firmly, and not one sign was lost upon Sebastian's cool, observant eyes; the head a little thrown back, eyes bright, the

pale cheek flushed, as if she braced herself to meet some peril. He saw and noted it all.

'You should be cautious how you influence him,' said he.

'I do not influence him. He is far too strong and decided to be influenced by—by a girl like me.'

Sebastian smiled politely but derisively.

'Pardon me, but I don't think you are quite right there. I am convinced you do influence him, and if so, don't you think it is unkind to prejudice him against his real interests?'

'His real interest is not to take charity. Mr. Mallory, the bare idea of Myles Heywood coming up to receive charity is dreadful. It makes me miserable to think of it—only I can't imagine his doing such a thing. He never will. Poor fellow! I am sorry for him!'

'Sooner or later it will come to that—it must,' said Sebastian. 'And I—you speak

as if I had tried to thrust alms upon him ostentatiously, like a rich man relieving a beggar, and then appealing to every one to notice his generosity. Can you suppose I intended anything so revolting?'

The usually placid and unruffled Sebastian spoke in a tone of deep vexation and chagrin.

'No, of course I did not suppose any such thing,' replied Adrienne, her face still flushed. 'I did not do you so much injustice. But I am glad he refused—so glad. I hope he will find something else. I even hope that this present trouble may turn out to be a means of improving his position, for I think he may turn his thoughts to some higher employment than mere drudgery in a factory—even though it is your factory,' she added, with a slight smile.

'He is certainly fit for a higher post. You would be glad to know him in such a situation, would you not?'

'Indeed I should.'

'Even though it took him away from—his friends and native town?' went on Sebastian somewhat ironically.

'Y—yes. Even in that case.'

'Well—who knows! It may turn out to be as you say.'

The conversation had been a far from satisfactory one to Sebastian. He had had no idea, a month ago, that Myles Heywood's image would take such an important place in his concerns. He turned the subject, and made arrangements with Adrienne about the school, but it seemed to him that since their passage of arms—for it had been a passage of arms—her eyes had brightened, and her voice had been more full and decided. He left her at last, firmly convinced that Myles was his formidable rival, and the conviction gave him a strange sensation, such as he had never known before. All his life he had been accustomed to quietly make up his mind, and then as quietly carry out his decision. Now, to his own astonishment, he

found himself strangely wavering between certainty and uncertainty, and as he walked from Mr. Blisset's house to his own, he pondered over the history of his own love for Adrienne, and, almost for the first time, began to wonder what would be the end of that history.

It was three years now since he had first met her. There had been a chamber concert, in Coblenz, of classical music. Adrian Blisset had played violin and his daughter piano, and Sebastian had been one of the not very numerous audience; for the taste of the Coblenzers for music was not of the severe sort. Perhaps the small audience was the more appreciative—at least Sebastian Mallory sat a long two hours and a half, without a thought of being weary or any wish to go. When the music was over he had penetrated to the little room whither Adrian and his daughter had retired; had knocked, and been bidden *herein.*

Apologising for the intrusion, he had in

troduced himself, and said he imagined that certain pieces that had been played that evening, and which stood on the programme without any composer's name, were the production of the musician himself. He was right, and as these compositions had appeared to him to possess a certain wild, weird beauty of their own, there had ensued a long conversation upon the subject, during which Sebastian's discrimination and real, earnest love for the art he professed had won over even Mr. Blisset's reserved and moody disposition.

Thus the acquaintance began.. The musician had been kinder and more open than he usually was, not only to strangers, but to any one at all. Sebastian had been allowed to visit him and his daughter. Adrienne had played for him; she had talked with him, and he had found her charming.

From Coblenz they had gone to Wetzlar, in the vain and illusory hope that there they might find an audience, and receive remune-

ration. The projected concert never took place, but certain other things did. They spent altogether a week in the sleepy old town. They floated in a little boat up the river, between the rows of poplars and the level meads; they sat under the shadow of the grim old *Heidenthurm* of the cathedral, and looked over all the landscape below. Adrienne sat upon the wall above Goethe's *Brunnen*, and looked at the girls coming to fill their pitchers, and said to Sebastian, who was standing beside her, and looking earnestly down at her:

'I wonder if it was to such a well that Hermann came and helped Dorothea? I could almost fancy so. Could not you?'

'I think I could,' Sebastian had answered, looking, not at the well, but at her.

With each day that he saw her, his admiration for her grew greater. She was a fair jewel in a poor setting. Her gentleness, her dignity under trouble and sorrow, her

'Festen Muth in schweren Leiden,'

impressed him, delighted him. Her flashes of quaint humour, which showed him how gay the spirit she owned might be, if only the sun would shine a little upon its dwelling-place; her grace, her intellect, attracted him irresistibly; and he loved, too, the quiet independence with which she met him; the calm dignity with which she ignored his wealth, his position, his advantages, and treated him as her equal—no more, no less.

Amongst the list of events which made, as it were, a gaily coloured, kaleidoscopic pattern in his memory, that week at Wetzlar stood out from the rest, like a little patch of pure gold, like the lucent background on which, stands out, pure and clear, some mediæval Madonna.

One morning, when he went to call upon them, he found Adrienne in sore distress, which she tried in vain to conceal. She was alone, and he had succeeded at last in getting her to confess what troubled her. A creditor of her father's pressed hard for a certain sum

of money, due long ago. That fact was in itself painful enough, but it alone would not have been sufficient to break down Adrienne's calm and steadfast courage. It was her father's manner of accepting, or not accepting, his position, which alarmed and made her wretched. More than once he had uttered dark and oracular hints as to the wisdom of leaving a world which was full of nothing but misery and contradictions. At that time he was in his room, and had refused to see her or speak to her. She did not know what would happen, what he might or might not do; and Sebastian saw the young girl's courage fail for the first time, for the first time saw her fold her hands, and, with tear-stained eyes, ask piteously:

'What am I to do?'

'Leave it to me, Miss Blisset. Of course something must be done, and I will do it. For your sake I will do it gladly,' he had said, taking her hands, looking into her troubled eyes with a glance that made them

more troubled still, and going straight to her father's room.

The 'something to be done' naturally resolved itself into pecuniary assistance. The matter was perfectly simple. Notes for three hundred thalers settled it. Sebastian insisted upon becoming Mr. Blisset's banker, and Mr. Blisset said that he could not refuse the possibility of being under obligations to a gentleman, who would understand the feelings of another gentleman, rather than to a coarse-minded tradesman, who could not by any possibility understand such fine sensibilities. The money was a loan. They both called it a loan; and Sebastian came out and told Adrienne that it was all right.

She had burst into tears; then recovering, had said:

'There is nothing that I would not do for you.'

To which he had replied:

'Then come and have a row on the river.'

Upon which they had straightway had a

very delightful row on the river, the Lahn; and delicacy alone had prevented Sebastian from then and there saying to Adrienne that he loved her, and asking her to be his wife. He deferred the question—he hoped, not for long—only until he had spoken to her father; and that he decided he would do the following day.

In pursuance of this resolution, he had called during the forenoon at the musician's lodgings, and had asked to see him.

'*Ja!*' the hostess told him, with a shrug of the shoulders, 'the *Herrschaften* had left by the first train that morning. Last night the gentleman had spoken very sternly to the Fräulein; she had heard him. The Fräulein had expostulated, and cried, and said, "How unthankful it will seem!" To which her Herr Papa had replied that he could not endure such a burden; he must leave the place. After which he had desired his *Fräulein Tochter* to pack up, and they were gone.'

'Where?' asked Sebastian.

'*Na!* How should I know, *mein Herr?* Apparently to Frankfort, since the first train in the morning goes direct there; but from Frankfort, I have heard, one may go out anywhere over the whole world, even to Africa, if one chooses. What do I know?'

Sebastian had retired, quite convinced that it was not Adrienne, but the morbid pride and vanity of her father, which had caused this *contretemps.* That pride could not endure to live in the presence of the man who had placed him under an obligation. He had gone to hide himself, and Sebastian tried in vain to find any further trace of Adrian Blisset and his daughter.

He had so much the less forgotten her. The feelings of warm admiration, chivalrous respect, and tender affection which he had hitherto felt for her, suddenly leaped up in a quicker flame—he loved her. From feeling convinced that to have her as his wife would be a good and a happy thing for him, he had

become determined that one day she should be his wife; she, and no other. From that time she had remained for him as a sort of standard, an ideal of womanhood; gentle, spirited, true, and pure, wise and prúdent, sweet and modest. He had judged all other women by this standard, and had never felt anything more than a certain admiration for any woman since his parting from Adrienne.

Then had ensued his return home, his not very satisfactory relations with his mother, the distress amongst his people, the necessity for prompt action and hard work, his introduction to Helena Spenceley, his sudden, unexpected meeting with Adrienne, and the eager conviction that now she soon must, should be his. Beside Helena's brilliant beauty, the delicate grace of Adrienne was as the beauty of a white violet compared with a crimson rose. Helena was dazzlingly beautiful, but she was the exact opposite of all which he had been for three years praising and exalting to himself as best, and sweetest,

and most desirable in woman. He thought a good deal of Helena. She was younger than Adrienne, wilder, less educated, prejudiced, hot-headed, violent, and bewitching.

'Yes, she must be bewitching,' argued Sebastian, with exquisite *naïveté*, within himself. 'Look at Hugo. The lad was enraptured with her.' That was to be expected. Hugo was young too; he had not loved Adrienne Blisset for three years. Sebastian had the steady purpose and intention of asking Adrienne to marry him, to honour him and make him happy by becoming his wife. When? As soon as he could find the opportunity, he said to himself. But it never did come. He could not understand how it was, that, though he saw Adrienne repeatedly, and alone, though she was amiable, cordial, pleasant, yet he could never get that question asked. Adrienne's behaviour puzzled him. He could have sworn that once she loved him. When he was with her, Myles Heywood's handsome olive-hued

face, with its scornful lips and defiant eyes, seemed always to be hovering there between her and him. And yet, on the one occasion on which he had seen them together, Myles had looked and behaved as if he were as far as possible from being anything like a favoured lover, thought Sebastian, with an odd sensation of jealousy and pain. No; it was only opportunity for which he waited, an opportunity which seemed as if it would never come. Certainly it had not been there that evening. He walked home lost in profound speculations, thinking of Adrienne's lifted head and flashing eyes, and of how Myles Heywood had been 'very stiff indeed' with poor old Wilson that morning.

CHAPTER III.

'Kannst du des Herzens Flammentrieb nicht dämpfen,
So fordre, Tugend, dieses Opfer nicht.'

TOWARDS eight o'clock on the following evening, Mary Heywood and Edmund were the only occupants of the kitchen. The lad was somewhat better and less feverish, and Myles had carried him downstairs and laid him upon his old resting-place, the chintz-covered sofa, under the window.

There he lay, with a shawl thrown across him; his thin face wasted to sharpness—a waxen pallor on his cheeks and lips; dark rings under his great bright eyes. His almost transparent hands were stretched out upon

the couch before him, and his unread book lay open across his knees. Mary had made things as cheerful as she could, so as not to let Edmund know how bitterly they were pinched in order to give him the things he needed. True, the fire was smaller than their kitchen fires were wont to be; and behind the cupboard-doors there was not very much to bring forth for supper; but the place was exquisitely clean and tidy, and so was the girl herself, in her faded gown, and with her pale pathetic face.

'Mary,' said Edmund, breaking a silence, 'does Miss Blisset never come here now?'

'Well, it's a good while, like, since hoo were here; likely hoo's had summat to do as has kept her away,' said Mary, as confidently as she could.

'I conno think why hoo ne'er comes. I could like to see her . . . where's Myles toneet?'

'Gone to the reading-room, he said. I'm some and glad he does go there. Some o'

these chaps is hanging about the livelong day, fair as if they didn't know what to do with theirsels. I reckon some on 'em will do summat as they shouldn't, before long.'

'Has Harry Ashworth been lately?' pursued Edmund, his thoughts turning towards his friends, now that he felt himself somewhat more free from pain and weariness.

'Ay—he's been more than once,' replied Mary, and her cheeks flushed, and she gave a great jump, as a knock resounded at that very moment through the house. The coincidence was too remarkable.

In a moment, however, she realised that the knock was at the front, not the back door, therefore it could not be Harry Ashworth who knocked; and secondly, it was not at all like his knock when he did knock. Wondering who the visitor could be, and casting a critical glance around, to see if the kitchen were as neat as it should be, she stepped out through the passage, and went

through the ceremony of unlocking and opening the door.

Outside, it was dark. Coming from the light of the kitchen she could not see who stood there, but a voice, which she had already heard once, and thought pleasant, inquired :

'Does Myles Heywood live here ?'

'Ay, he does ; but he's out.'

'Oh, is he ? I'm sorry. I felt sure he would be in in the evening.'

The visitor still lingered on the doorstep, and inquired again :

'Do you know how long he will be ?'

Mary's sense of hospitality was stronger than even her dread of Myles's displeasure.

'Won't you step in a minute, and see if he comes ? It's Mr. Mallory, isn't it ?'

'Yes. I did want to see him very particularly.'

''Appen, if you were to sit you down a bit, he might coom back soon,' suggested Mary, fervently trusting that he would do nothing

of the kind ; and that Mr. Mallory would get tired of waiting as quickly as she knew Myles himself did.

With a word of thanks Mr. Mallory accepted the invitation, and entered the house. A proper attention to established etiquette would have led Mary to usher him into the highly-coloured parlour, but the recollection that there was no fire there, and that some of the furniture was wanting, overcame conventional rules, and he was taken forward into the kitchen.

'I hope I am not intruding,' he began, so courteously that all Mary's innate politeness was roused to action, and his welcome was more effusive than it might otherwise have been.

'Eh, dear no! Please take a seat!' said Mary, pulling up her own rocking-chair. 'Me and Edmund was quite alone, and not doin' nowt at all, except talk a bit. Ned, here's Mr. Mallory. You've ne'er seen him afore.'

Edmund had never been aware of Myles's deep antipathy to the young master; he only knew that his brother had a sort of contempt for his employer, as a useless, highly-finished piece of humanity, not good for much in such a rough place as Thanshope. He himself was intensely sensitive to refinement and beauty, in every shape and form, and as Sebastian was handsome, polished, and refined in an eminent degree, Edmund's eyes rested upon him with a sense of satisfaction and soothed pleasure and delight, and he smiled pleasantly as he took the hand which their visitor extended, saying kindly:

'I fear you are a great invalid.'

'I'm none so strong,' said Edmund. 'I've been ill, but now I'm better.'

'I suppose you are Myles Heywood's brother and sister?' continued Sebastian.

'Ay,' said the others, and they smiled—that smile of mingled pride and affection which speaks well for the absent one, and which Sebastian noted directly.

He took a chair by Edmund's sofa, and turning to Mary, said :

'I suppose you know your brother has had his name and yours taken off my books.'

'Ay,' responded Mary, colouring with some embarrassment, while Edmund looked rather anxiously from the one to the other, this being the first he had heard of the circumstance.

'Was it your wish too, to leave my employment so suddenly?' he asked slowly.

'I didn't know—Myles did it. He thought it would be for the best, I suppose, sir,' stammered the girl.

'But you,' he persisted gently—'have you such an intense objection to receiving a little assistance in such a time of distress, from a —you don't say master here, I notice—from an employer whom you have served so long and so well as I hear you have done? I should not have thought so. You know it is not an ordinary case. It is not as if you or I, or any of us here, could have prevented it. There can be no shame——'

'I never thought there was,' said Mary, wondering in her distress what could be the grudge that Myles had against such a master as this. 'I fair cried wi' joy when I heard what you was going to do; but when Myles came in, and told me——'

'But you do not mean that he has forbidden you—that he prevents—it is——'

'No!' said Mary suddenly. 'Our Myles is not one of that sort, I can tell you, Mr. Mallory. He won't take a penny himself—why, I don't know. And I saw as it would go near to break his heart to see me and yon lad eating another man's bread, and him standing by idle. But he said to me, "Thou'll do what thou's a mind to, Molly; it's a great distress, and we m—mun be g—great to meet it." Oh! it were same as if he'd said, "There's nowt for't but to cut off my right hand; give me th' chopper, and let me do it!"—that it were!'

She sobbed vehemently once or twice, and Sebastian read the passionate love and devo-

tion she felt for that brother, whom, he began to think, he never could conquer.

'Ah! that is more like him!' he said warmly. 'I thought I was mistaken. And will nothing persuade you to accept this help? It is such a small thing to refuse; and I do not think it right in you to refuse it. You must think of this brother of yours. He cannot stand the hardships of this time as Myles, and even you, can; and——'

'You are very good—reet-down kind, you are!' said Mary, looking at him with gratitude. 'I'll say this. We'll hold out as long as we can. We mun do that, if we want to think well of ourselves. But I'll come to you when it gets too much. You're reet; I can't see nowt to be ashamed of in it.'

'You promise?'

'Ay, I promise.'

'That is well. Now, if your brother would come in, I could say what I have to say to him, and——'

Mary lifted her head. She heard foot-

steps along the flags at the back, and the tune being whistled which no one but Myles ever did whistle. She started forward as the back-door was opened, and exclaimed :

'Here's Myles ; he's coming now.'

'Ah, I'm glad of that,' said Sebastian, though he was fully conscious of Mary's discomfited looks. 'Now I can speak to him myself.'

The back-door was closed again ; the quick steps grew leisurely ; presently the kitchen-door also was opened, and the voice of Myles was heard, saying, as he entered :

'I say, Molly, thou must——'

He came in, and looked round with a smile, which flashed out of his face as he saw who was there. His first impulse was to ask fiercely, 'What brings *you* to my house?' But Myles had very strongly developed the proverbial Lancashire sense of hospitality, and, accordingly, he suppressed his question, and remained silent, until Sebastian offered him his hand, saying courteously :

'I hope you will not think I am intruding. I particularly wished to see you, and your sister was so kind as to ask me to wait a few minutes, in the hope that you would return.'

Sebastian had spoken just in time. Myles was assailed on the side of hospitality, politeness to a guest, and other similar feelings. He realised quickly that Sebastian had not acted as most masters would have done—sent for him to come and see him—but had come himself to seek him out, and now apologised for intruding in the most handsome and ample manner. There was nothing there that even his sore heart could construe into a slight. Moreover, the man was there, under his roof—had been invited there; and, if Molly might have been wiser, the thing was done, and he must act accordingly. He could not look cordial—the sense of the advantages which the other had over him was too heavily and oppressively present for that—but he could be civil, he could speak words something like welcome. He could even,

under the circumstances, accept the hand which Mallory held out—or rather, circumstances did not allow him to refuse it. Accordingly, he took the hand, standing very erect, and looking very proud and solemn, while Mary knitted more quickly, as she observed, from her seat in the background, how each man looked straight and steadily into the other's eyes.

'Won't you take a seat?' said Myles, handing a chair to Sebastian, and taking one himself. 'It's a cold night, and you've had a longish walk.'

'Thank you. It was on a small matter of business that I called—about your having taken your name from my books.'

'Yes,' said Myles, his eyebrows setting suddenly in a straight line across his brow, and his lips in one nearly as straight beneath his moustache.

'It was this. I do hope you will not think that I come out of any officiousness or curiosity, because it is not so. Mr. Sutcliffe told

me you had left my employment. I asked him if he thought you had any other occupation; and he said that, so far as he knew, you had not. I concluded, whether rightly or not, that your reason for leaving was, that the factory was closed, and you would not accept assistance without working for it. Was I right?'

'Yes,' said Myles concisely.

'I know that employment, especially remunerative employment, is not easy to find in these bad times, and that you might not soon find anything to do; so I merely called to say that I know of two situations, for either of which you would be suited, and if you would like me to use my influence to get you either of them, I shall be glad to do so. You must not think that I meant anything else.

'You are very kind,' said Myles, in the same constrained and colourless voice, which belied his contracted brows and the fiery flash of his eyes beneath them—'very kind;

but I do not require any assistance, thank you !'

The manner and the tone were such that Sebastian felt he could not, after what he had said, urge his offer any further. But the desire which he constantly felt, when with Myles, to gain his esteem and win his confidence, rushed more strongly over him than ever before. He saw in the young man so much that was noble, so much that was good, so much that he, in his quiet, reserved way, intensely prized. Sebastian had a strong, though secret, desire to be much loved, to greatly influence certain individuals. He felt very strongly that where Myles Heywood loved or admired, it would be with a passionate, whole-hearted devotion, which would go all lengths ; and he desired greatly to see some other expression light those sombre, moody eyes, when they looked at him ; to compel that right hand to stretch itself towards him in a genial, spontaneous clasp of friendship and regard.

Was it possible that he who before now had won hearts, both of men and of women; he who had inspired that fitful, capricious artist, Hugo, with a passionate love and devotion; he who had seen Adrienne Blisset's quiet eyes well over with something more than gratitude; he who felt within him the potentiality to subdue that fiery-hearted Helena, did he but choose to give his mind to the task, and to bring her to his feet with a devotion as intense as her present half-assumed scorn—was it possible that he was to be baffled by a young, uncultivated, untutored, unsophisticated artisan, who could continue to resist, defy, and scorn him, in spite of all his efforts to the contrary. Was it possible that this plain-spoken Myles Heywood, with nothing on his side but his prejudices, his pride, and his love, could continue to hold Sebastian Mallory at arm's length, when he really set his whole battery of persuasion to work upon him? The idea was a galling one. He did not like effusive-

ness, but he did like devotion very much. He hated a display of power; but the power itself he loved dearly. Myles, in his present attitude, represented a defiant obstacle which must be overcome. But how?

Mary here afforded him unconsciously a little assistance, by saying in a tearful voice:

'Eh, Myles, do think about it! Remember how badly off we are. It's not for mysel', its for Edmund and thee. I canna bear to think o' thee bein' so pulled down and troubled wi' such things. Thou'rt too good for it.'

'Molly, lass, don't make it worse for me!' said Myles, with a reproachful look, and Mary was silenced, as Sebastian saw.

She sat down in a rocking-chair and cried quietly, wiping her eyes at intervals, but she said no more. Myles turned his back upon her, not wishing to see her distress. Sebastian had also stood up. The man's pride was stiffer than even he had supposed, and his desire to bend it became proportionately greater.

'I am very sorry you will not let me do anything,' he said. 'You are quite mistaken in thinking there could be any degradation in it.'

'I never said I did think so,' interposed Myles.

'You are not without ambition,' pursued Sebastian, fixing his eyes upon Myles with conviction, and noting the answering flush in his face, though his eyes remained downcast. 'No man who is worth anything is without ambition. If you would let me, I could put you into the way of furthering your ambition. Of course, it would be a struggle; but then you are one of the right kind to struggle—you like it. A few years' absence from England, a few years' hard work in a post for which you would be well suited, and you might return here if you liked, a different man, in a different position, able to do and get pretty much what you liked. Remember, to a man of courage, who has made a mark, *most things that he wishes for stand*

open. Is this nothing to you? Do you prefer remaining shut up in Thanshope with your own prospects, and the prospects of your fellow-workmen no better than they are? I cannot believe it of you.'

Almost unconsciously, Sebastian had half-cast aside the mask of indifference, and was speaking nearly as eagerly as he felt. He had stepped up to Myles, and laid his hand upon his arm. Their eyes met. Myles's very soul had been stirred by the words he had heard.

They had touched the very well-spring of his present wishes and desires, the longing which had grown and intensified with his love and his sense of its utter hopelessness. To leave this place—go away to some other spot, where there would be scope for hard work, mental and bodily—work that would absorb his energies. There was nothing he desired more than such work. His enforced idleness was absolutely hideous to him. Out of England, he might advance, rise; Sebastian,

he knew, was not wont to speak rashly or unadvisedly on such matters, but was given to measuring his words. He might return an altered man, well-off, perhaps, or at least with the means of becoming well-off; why, he might (it all seemed to flash in a second through his mind)—he might go at last, and seek Adrienne—and find her gone, hear that she was Sebastian Mallory's wife. And *then* the acceptance of Sebastian Mallory's assistance would have caused his last state to be worse than his first. He would have stooped, not to conquer, but to be forestalled, defeated, humiliated, and all the riches, and all the position that the world could give, would not restore his hopes and his lost self-respect. With a short, sardonic, miserable laugh, he jerked his arm from Sebastian's hand, and said, almost angrily:

'It is of no use. You will never persuade me to that. It is wasted breath to try it.'

Sebastian felt an absolute thrill of vexation

and mortification; a thrill so strong as to surprise himself.

'What makes you so obstinate?' he unwarily exclaimed. 'Is it some personal reason?'

'Yes,' answered Myles, looking him directly in the eyes; 'it is!'

Sebastian's lips were parted to speak, but he could not utter the words he intended to say. He was silent, with a disagreeable, discomfiting sense that he was baffled and defeated. They were all silent, till Sebastian said:

'Well, since you will not, you will not. But I think you are mistaken in your course, and what is more, I think you will repent it before long. If you do, if you should come to change your mind, let me know. I have no wish to take my word back, but shall always be ready to abide by it.'

Myles smiled, almost scornfully, as he bowed his head slightly, and said:

'Thank you.'

In his inmost heart he was thinking that he would rather die than place himself under obligations to his rival, whose full formidableness he only realised to-night. There was, he confessed it fully and frankly to himself, something extremely attractive about the grace and courtesy of Sebastian, but the most dangerous quality was the power which soon became distinctly visible beneath the polish; a power which forced the observer, however reluctantly, to respect as well as to admire. If he, the unwilling and prejudiced, felt these things so strongly, how much more must others, already prejudiced in his favour, experience it? So much the more reason why he, the plain and unadorned, should keep himself to himself, follow his own path, and not ape qualities so different from his own. But he had ceased to bear any ill-will to Sebastian. The latter did not know how far he had advanced in the very moment in which he seemed to have receded.

'I will not intrude upon you any longer,'

said he. 'You bear no resentment, I trust, but understand my motives?'

'I bear no resentment at all,' said poor Myles, putting his hand without hesitation into that held out to him. 'If I have been rather rough, I beg your pardon. It is my way. I meant no incivility.'

'I am sure of it. Good-night,' he added, turning to Edmund. 'Good-night, Miss Heywood.'

'Good-night, sir,' said Mary, looking tearfully up, as Sebastian followed Myles from the room. She heard the door open and shut, and the steps of the unwonted visitor going away. Then Myles returned to the kitchen.

Edmund was tired. Myles helped him upstairs, and came down again. They scarcely spoke. Mary uttered no reproach, and he offered no apology; but when she got up to go to bed, he kissed her tenderly, saying:

'Don't think too hardly of me, Molly. I can't do otherwise and be an honest man at the same time.'

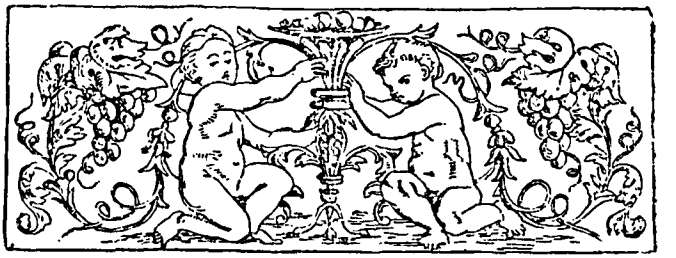
'I'm none thinking of blaming thee, lad,' said Mary, escaping from him, and going upstairs.

He remained there a long time, brooding over the embers of the fire, and thinking, if only things had been different! And as he thought, a vision rose before him of that Sunday afternoon when he had so nearly betrayed himself, and he remembered Adrienne's words:

'If I loved that man, and he loved me, and asked me to be his wife, I would say yes; and I would love him and serve him as long as I lived.'

'Ay, my darling!' his heart cried within him, in a kind of anguish, 'but you don't love me; and if you did, I should not be worthy of you, if I did what was wrong to win you.'

No doubt he took a wild, fantastic, mistaken view of things; but to him it was much more real than if the most accomplished logician had argued it out for him, and proved it to be founded on the purest and most solidly reasonable basis.



CHAPTER IV.

COMBINATION *v.* STARVATION.

FOR the space of some six weeks—that is, from early March to the middle of April—Adrienne, Helena, Mr. Sutcliffe, Hugo, Sebastian, and others who worked with them or under them, had toiled hard at the schools of both kinds which Mr. Mallory had opened, in connection with his relief system. At first considerable difficulties were naturally experienced; some of the work-people grumbled bitterly at being obliged to 'go to school again,' as the condition of receiving a sum which appeared to them small indeed, after the abundant

wages they had for years been earning; but the tact and kindness of the three principals, Sebastian, Adrienne, and good little Mr. Sutcliffe, and the hearty manner in which they were backed up by their subordinates, soon worked wonders. Ere long the work-people themselves discovered how much better off they were than those of their friends whose masters had not seen fit to provide for them; and who were just then groaning under the obnoxious 'labour test,' as it was called, which roused so much gall and bitterness before the sewing and educational schools were fairly started. Learning to make clothes, or reading, writing, and arithmetic, were felt to be decidedly more distinguished and elevating employments than stone-breaking, or road-making, and were, moreover, much better adapted to the lissom fingers, and to the physique, accustomed to sedentary labour in a high temperature, of the operatives. By degrees they fell into their places. They felt that

they were known, and expected, and missed if they did not come at the appointed time. The great warehouse was warmed and lighted, and threw open its doors hospitably wide to receive them. 'Mallory's schools' were known all over the town, and those who attended them were envied by those who did not.

For the principals the task was, as Sebastian had told Adrienne, no joke. It was continuous, dry drudgery. The routine was monotonous, and the discipline strict; but the master and head of it all was the first to adhere unswervingly to every rule laid down, and his coadjutors followed with unhesitating obedience. Mr. Blisset received more kisses and thanks from his niece just now, than she had ever bestowed before—kisses and thanks for what she called his goodness in sparing her to help the poor people in their great distress. She was with him much less than usual, and perhaps did not therefore notice so much his pallor and weakness, and

the strength which was failing in every way. He, for some reason, withheld the truth from her, and did not tell her that he felt almost at the end of his weary, dismal pilgrimage. It was only to Sebastian that he spoke about that—Sebastian, who had become the trusted friend of the poor, lonely man.

Adrienne and Helena worked heartily, hand-in-hand. That was no time for petty bickerings and jealousies. Even sectarians forgot their differences in the imperative necessity for administering to the great need and woe of the people. In working-hours Adrienne forgot entirely who Helena was; and knew her only as a hearty helper, a quick, bright, kind-hearted girl, to whom no trouble was too great, and no task too hard. It was not quite the same with Helena. She had divined, by some subtle means—herself scarce knew how — that Adrienne was no other than 'the nicest girl I ever knew,' and Miss Spenceley's eyes grew intensely critical. Every word, every gesture

and action of her coadjutor was weighed in a nice balance, and, so far, had not been found wanting. Helena herself was, without knowing it, changing rapidly. Despite a certain vague disquietude of heart, she was happier than she had ever been in her life before. She threw herself into her new work with her characteristic passionate energy and vehemence, and her contact with life, and some of its sternest lessons, was rubbing down her preconceived extravagances of expression, though she still, in word and theory, cherished them as fondly as ever. But it was impossible that one of her intensely sensitive and receptive mind could behold what she daily did, of sorrow and pain, of ignorance and helplessness, and remain the same. She saw into depths in this our life of which she had never dreamed, and which Laura Mereweather's philosophy passed over entirely.

It has been acknowledged on all sides that the benefits, at that time, were not only on

one side. It was not only the rough factory-girls who came to learn; but also the delicate ladies who gave up time and comfort and their best energies to teach, who profited by the intercourse. In the sad and degrading spectacle of this spring of 1878, the sweet lessons learned and taught in that bitter season of 1862 seem almost to have been forgotten and obliterated. Many a benighted girl—many an uneducated, ignorant matron, roused to her toil at half-past five in the morning; and prevented by its long monotony from acquiring any domestic grace, learnt almost her first notions of making home happy and comfortable, in the schools that were set up in the 'panic.'

Then, in the woe of the poor, and the sympathy of the rich, it almost seemed as if the great black frowning barriers of caste had been overthrown; but the division of classes, the opposition between master and man, is a plant of sturdy growth, and strikes its roots deep and far under the earth. Now,

sixteen years later, comes a strike almost without parallel for bitterness and unyielding stubbornness on either side; a strike accompanied by rioting and mob-rule, broken windows, houses sacked, men assaulted, women and children threatened; and the necessity for a strong military force to preserve even the outward semblance of order; and this, on the identical ground where, during the cotton famine, the sore distress was most nobly borne and most generously relieved. These things make a riddle hard to read.

Adrienne and Helena found both their mental and physical energies taxed to the utmost by the work they had undertaken, but neither had any thought of giving up. With Adrienne it was a labour of calm, affectionate duty; she went to it with an enlightened sense of her own responsibilities, and a full comprehension of the gravity of the crisis. With Helena it was something quite different; she worked eagerly, till she was wearied, and scarcely knew why she did

it. Of course she was sorry for the poor people, and pitied them in their present condition, and was anxious to keep them, strained every nerve to do her work; but she thought more about Adrienne Blisset and Sebastian Mallory than about all the poor people in Thanshope.

She was changing rapidly, without knowing it. In the presence of this great urgent need, and of her own deeper emotions, all the flimsy theories of the past were being utterly undermined, though outwardly towering as high and as fair as ever. She was no happier in her home-relations than before. Sebastian's conduct was condemned there by her father and brother. She knew that it was only because of Sebastian's wealth and Mrs. Mallory's high position in the town, that she was allowed to participate in what was called the 'madness' of Mr. Mallory. Fool and madman were the mildest words in the vocabulary of the Spenceley men, by which to describe Sebastian's course. It was wrong

and iniquitous in him, they said, to set such an example, as if every mill-owner in Thanshope could be expected to support his hands while this confounded war lasted.

'Every mill-owner—no!' said Helena, with flashing eyes. 'So many of them are too poor. They have not the means; but if all those who could afford it, did so, it would only be their duty — their bare duty, and there would not be so many begging letters in the papers, asking for help for the richest county in the richest country in the world.'

She was informed that she knew nothing about it, and that it was only to keep her out of some other mischief that she was allowed to have anything to do with such folly.

('And,' she thought to herself, with a hard smile, 'because Sebastian Mallory is rich and influential, and I see him every day, there.')

The conversation turned to Helena's coming

birthday, when she would attain her majority, and great festivities would be the order of the day. With tears in her eyes, she took the opportunity to implore her father to give up the ball which would cost so much money, and to give her half, nay, a quarter of the sum he intended to spend upon it, that she might give it to Miss Blisset or Mr. Mallory and have it used for relief purposes; but the request was peremptorily refused, and she was told, in oracular language, that she did not know what was good either for herself or the work-people. Moreover, she was informed, it was all very well for a pretty girl to play at women's rights, but that a daughter was expected to obey her father; and the regal Fred remarked that a fool and her money were soon parted, and he would back Helena for making ducks and drakes of any property she might ever have, if it were not pretty tightly tied up.

'I suppose it is only finished gentlemen like yourself who know how to make proper

use of their money, and their time,' said Helena, turning upon him bitterly. 'I can tell you the whole town will cry shame on both of you—the richest men in it, and you have scarcely subscribed five pounds to keep your own work-people from starving.'

'I didn't become the richest man in Thanshope by pouring my money into my workpeople's pockets,' said Mr. Spenceley grimly.

And Helena, with a passionate 'Psha!' rushed from the room, drawing on her gloves as she went, to go forth to her afternoon labours at the school.

This was in the middle of March, and as she came up the cindery path leading to the little anteroom which Sebastian and his staff were in the habit of using as an office, he and Miss Blisset sat at the window, watching her approach.

'What a lovely, graceful creature she is!' said Adrienne admiringly, as the tall supple figure of the girl came swiftly up the walk.

'I often wonder how she can be the child of such parents.'

'There is some southern impetuousness in her nature,' he replied, 'and a capacity for southern rages, too,' he added, watching her and smiling. 'Look at her now, Miss Blisset; do you see that frown, and how her eyes are flashing, and her lips set?'

'Yes, I do; but that is a very unusual expression with her. I wonder what is the matter with her.'

Here Helena came in, somewhat in the whirlwind style; her tall figure erect—her silken skirts angrily sweeping about her.

'You look annoyed, Miss Spenceley,' said Adrienne, looking up from where she sat, composed and cool.

'Annoyed!' repeated Helena, whose anger and mortification had been augmenting all the time since she had left home, and whose voice vibrated; 'they tell me on all sides that my father is the richest man in Thanshope, and that I shall have more money than

I know what to do with—some time. Some time, indeed! And I cannot get five pounds now, to help people with. I've given away all my money. I have just half-a-crown in the world, and I can't get any more for a month. Do you call *that* the proper way to treat a woman who will be responsible for five thousand a year—*some time?* My father said I should. Do you call that the right means to accustom her to the duties of her position?'

She had turned suddenly, and almost fiercely to Sebastian.

'Not at all,' said he, at once; perceiving that her lips quivered, and that she was divided between tears of mortification and flames of anger. 'Not at all; but, my dear Miss Spenceley, so long as we have your services, the money which you do or do not contribute is not of the very least consequence.'

'Don't say that to me!' she exclaimed excitedly. 'What is the use? My services are nothing; I can do nothing.'

'Indeed, I don't know what I should do without you,' said Adrienne. 'You can influence these girls and women sometimes, when I can make nothing of them. You can make them laugh heartily, when all my efforts can only extort a solemn stare from them.'

'You must not talk of going,' chimed in Sebastian. 'It is your countenance alone which reconciles my mother to the undertaking. And if you did not come,' he added, smiling, 'I don't believe Hugo would have anything to say to it; and he is invaluable to me amongst the boys. For heaven's sake, don't desert us!'

Helena, with downcast eyes, was taking off her gloves. Her cheek was flushed, and she smiled a little triumphantly.

'Girls can do something then, after all?' said she.

'Have I not two living and bright proofs of the fact before me now?' he replied, looking from the one to the other.

'Ah, yes!' said Helena coolly, while the flush died from her cheek, and the smile faded from her lips. 'Would you mind helping me off with my mantle? Thanks. There comes Hugo von Birkenau, and there is our first batch of girls, Miss Blisset. What is the programme for this afternoon?'

She was all business now; had tied on a great holland apron, studded with baggy-looking pockets, and slung a huge pair of scissors by a string around her slim waist. Adrienne was accoutred in a similar manner. Helena stopped some of the girls who were coming in, to make them carry a pile of calico to the workroom. Raising his hat, Sebastian left them to their labours, and joined Hugo outside.

Half of the great warehouse had been temporarily cleared, and accommodated with benches and half-a-dozen huge deal tables. This afternoon was to be a 'cutting-out' lesson—a lesson which, sooth to say, Helena had had to learn herself for the occasion,

from her mother. The two young ladies, with some half-dozen others, who rapidly followed on Helena's steps, each took a class, and began their instructions; the women and girls standing round, and many a dozen of them receiving their very first impressions as to the practical construction of the clothes they wore. The directions were clear and simple enough; care was taken, by questionings and cross-questionings, that the pupils should thoroughly understand what was being explained to them.

When the 'cutting out' was over, they were shown how to fix the things, and as they all sat doing this, each one bringing up her performance when it was complete, for approval or correction, there was much talking, and some singing, chiefly of hymns, in very high, and generally in minor keys. It was very fatiguing work: the long standing, the continuous talking, explaining, expounding, arranging and re-arranging for the stiff, unaccustomed fingers, formed no light task.

After more than two hours and a half of such labour, it was time to go. The work was folded up, piled in heaps, laid on one side, and the pupils prepared to leave.

Adrienne and Helena, both very tired, stood at the door, counting them as they filed out.

'Three hundred and five,' they exclaimed together, as the last one departed, and they smiled, and turned inside the room again, to divest themselves of their aprons and shears.

'Miss Blisset, will you not come home with me, and have some tea?' asked Helena, who had given the invitation several times before, and always received the same answer as on this occasion.

'Thank you very much. I am sorry to say I cannot come.'

'You always say that,' said Helena, looking earnestly at her. 'I have tried in vain to get a little conversation with you, and to know you better. I never see you, except at this dingy schoolroom, where I am sure the

incentives to cheerful intercourse are not strong.'

Adrienne smiled rather faintly as she replied:

'I am sorry; it looks rude, I know, but I must go home to my uncle. He is not very well at present; and I am obliged to leave him so much. You must excuse me!'

'If I must, I must, I suppose, but I don't, all the same,' said Helena, turning away in some dissatisfaction, and at that moment Sebastian and Hugo entered, arm in arm.

'Miss Spenceley!' said Hugo eagerly, going up to her; 'it is getting dark. May I accompany you home?'

'Oh yes, if you like,' said Helena absently, while she attentively listened to what was passing between their fellow-workers.

'Miss Blisset,' she heard Sebastian say; 'your uncle particularly asked me to call this afternoon. I will walk with you to Stonegate, if you will allow me.'

'I shall be very glad,' said she. 'I am

sure he will be pleased to see you. Do you know, sometimes I am afraid he will not live long.'

'His is hardly likely to be a long life,' said Sebastian, evasively.

'Oh, but it may be. Invalids—when they are taken such care of as I take of him—sometimes live a long time. And he is not old, and it is not as if he had a complaint in which there was danger of his dying suddenly.'

'Do you dread his death so much?' asked Sebastian folding her shawl around her.

'I do; and I fear, for selfish reasons. Without him I should be perfectly alone in the world.'

'You alone? not unless you wished it,' said he, almost reproachfully, whilst Helena, assisted by the proud and happy Hugo, was wrapping herself in her fur-lined mantle with the sable border; the mantle which set off her dark, piquante beauty to the utmost advantage; for she was one of those truly English beauties who look almost lovelier in

their outdoor dress, and with the flush of exercise upon their cheeks, than in the airy fabrics of the ball-room. But there was no flush upon Helena's cheeks now. She turned to the boy who had been, or wished to be since he first saw her, her particular page in attendance (he aspired to nothing more in his own mind, and despite all unfavourable circumstances, he had always seen Helena the wife of his worshipped friend), and said, in a voice that had sunk and grown tired:

'Come, Hugo, I have no time to spare. We will leave the others to lock up. I must go.'

'I am ready, and waiting your pleasure, *mein gnädiges Fräulein.*'

'Don't speak foreign tongues to me. Do you forget what Gretchen said to Faust when he called her Fräulein?'

'"Thank you, sir, I can walk home by myself." That would be shocking, and I will not do it again.'

'Good-afternoon!' suddenly said Helena,

in a loud, clear voice, as she looked carelessly over her shoulder at the other two, who started, as if suddenly recalled to a sense of what was going on around them.

Hugo and his companion left the mill-yard, and paced down the street in the bitter cold of the March twilight, now rapidly becoming darkness. The lamps were being lighted; some shops were open; the passengers along the streets were not many; the great factories were silent, there was no cloud of smoke to obscure the frostily twinkling stars.

Helena suddenly began to speak, in a voice bitter, though it strove to be careless, and with a short laugh that was not a merry one.

'How affecting—truly affecting it is, to see two such congenial spirits together as Mr. Sebastian Mallory and Miss Adrienne Blisset. He likes a rose-watery kind of woman, who looks up to him and thinks he is better than she is herself, and wiser; and

she likes a dreamy, unpractical kind of man, full of sweet compliments and vague generalities—like a sugar-plum that breaks in your mouth, and then you find it has been full of a weak, diluted kind of essence—like Sebastian Mallory.'

'What a comparison!' exclaimed Hugo, in a tone almost of offence. 'You are very harsh, sometimes, Miss Spenceley. Sebastian dreamy and unpractical! *Jawohl!* I used to think so once; but I have found out that there is an iron hand under the silken glove. Once I fancied he was all art, all-——'

'All art!' said Helena, perversely twisting his imperfect English to suit her own purposes; 'perhaps you were not so far wrong there, Hugo.'

'What has occurred to vex you, *mein Fräulein?*' asked her companion innocently.

'To vex me? I am not vexed. I am tired, and it is so cold. Well, go on! I don't think very highly of Mr. Mallory, as you may be aware; and I should like to hear what you

can find to say in his favour. What other good points has he?'

'*Herrgott!* He is all good.'

'Ha! ha!'

'Miss Spenceley——'

'A good, bigoted Tory and Conservative, despite his professed radicalism. Mrs. Mallory need not have been distressed. He may call himself what he likes, but he hates progress.'

'I don't understand about Radicals and Conservatives,' said Hugo, good-humouredly. 'I am densely ignorant about politics. In Prussia there are Liberals and Conservatives, and Social Democrats, but I don't know what any of them want. I don't think the *Reichstag* is the sphere for me—do you?'

'Good gracious! how should I know? I was not talking about Social Democrats or the *Reichstag*. If you don't know anything about them, you know something else. Hugo,' she said, softening her voice confidentially.

'I know that you are charming—so kind to me,' said he, with a vibration in his voice, and indeed, Helena had been very kind to the boy; 'and I know that you sing, "Since first I saw your face," like an angel.'

'You know, perfectly well, that Mr. Mallory and Miss Blisset are desperately in love with one another—deny it if you can.'

Hugo was silent.

'You cannot,' said Helena triumphantly.

'I am not in their confidence,' he said slowly.

'All the world is in the confidence of people who are so far gone as they are. If you mean to say that they did not each take you separately aside, and tell you in so many words—well, I can say the same. He that hath eyes to see, let him observe.'

Hugo was not yet master enough of the English language to be able to turn off her remark. Helena began to hum a little song to herself, and then suddenly sank into silence and gravity, until it began to snow, and grew

quite dark, when she shivered, putting up her umbrella, and saying pettishly:

'My mantle will be ruined. Why didn't I bring a cloak? I declare another day, when the weather is so bad, I won't take this horrid long walk.'

'You will rather drive?' suggested Hugo, with apparently the most childlike innocence of her meaning,

'How ridiculous you are! How far is it, Hugo, from the mill to Stonegate?'

'About as far as from the mill to Castle Hill, only in exactly the opposite direction.'

'Oh! I don't know that end of the town at all. We, at any rate, have had time for a delightful conversation, haven't we? Come in, and have some tea, and play me something.'

Nothing loth, Hugo followed her, and they vanished within the portals of Castle Hill.

CHAPTER V.

'Death, with most grim and grisly visage seene,
Yet is he nought but parting of the breath;
Ne ought to see, but like a shade to weene,
Unbodiéd, unsoul'd, unheard, unseene.'

ADRIENNE and Sebastian were walking 'just the opposite way,' with very little more satisfaction to themselves than Hugo and Helena had found. Helena was constantly picturing Sebastian to herself as engaged in half-intellectual, half-amorous discourse with the 'nicest of girls'; his mind elevated by her spiritual observations, and his languid, but ever-present sense of superiority (this was Helena's theory) gratified by her deference

to his superior wisdom. It was a comical theory—one worthy of Helena's vivid imagination and hopelessly impractical ideas; and was, moreover, as far removed from the truth as she herself could possibly have wished. Yes, wished; for while the delusive vision kept dangling before her mental eyes, and while she professed to sneer and scoff at it, it was in reality an ever-present, dull pain, none the less real because not clearly comprehended clearly for what it was.

On this especial evening, Adrienne was tired more than usual, and mentally as well as physically weary. An undefined pain and distress had troubled her mind for some weeks—to-day the cloud was very dark. She had seen Sebastian Mallory growing more and more intimate with her uncle, and progressing with great rapidity in the favour of that most fastidious individual; she had seen—how could she help seeing—Sebastian's attention to herself; how, when he was with her, his eyes constantly turned towards her,

and how a light flashed into their quietness when they met her; how his voice in speaking to her, took a deeper sound. He was good, rich, handsome, clever, kind. She knew all his good qualities, and thoroughly valued them. She approved of him; she liked his presence; it was pleasant to her. She remembered with deep, earnest gratitude his delicate kindness and attention to her in those days gone by, when her troubles with her father, and her terrible struggle against their adverse circumstances, had threatened to overwhelm her. 'I would do anything for you,' she had said, and had meant it. And yet, now! How painfully, unaccountably, unexpectedly things changed! Thus meditating, her step dragged, and her head drooped a little, as they paced the dreary length of Blake Street together. She did not understand why that load of oppression and longing—that *Sehnsucht* should just now lie so heavily upon her heart. Sebastian paused at the gate, and laid his hand upon

it, and then Adrienne seemed to see, in a flash of sunlight, Myles Heywood's tall figure and earnest face; as he, in the same attitude, almost a year ago, had laid his hand upon that wicket, and had opened it for her to pass in. Her heart throbbed—something rose in her throat as she entered.

'Myles has not been near us for weeks,' said she to herself. 'I will go and call there some day, very soon,' she added valiantly, 'and ask the reason of it, and if I have done anything to offend them.'

Mr. Blisset, his servant said, was not at all well. He felt very weak, and had gone to bed, but he had left word that if Mr. Mallory called, he particularly wished to see him.

Sebastian followed the man upstairs. Adrienne went into the drawing-room, and mechanically sat down, without even turning up the shaded lamp, and her hands clasped themselves before her upon her knees.

Sebastian sat a long time beside Mr. Blis-

set's bed, for their conversation was prolonged. At last Mr. Blisset said :

'And I have made you one of my executors. I hope you don't mind. I have so few friends.'

'I am honoured in being chosen, and will gladly undertake it.'

'Thank you. Of course, I have left everything to Adrienne. She will be placed above all money troubles; for she is like me, she has no extravagant desires. But I should wish the child to have a staunch friend, and you are different from other young men, or I would not have asked it. Will you be her friend?'

'It is my most earnest wish. But since we have spoken of this, I may as well tell you the whole truth. I have loved your niece for a long time—for years. When I find an opportunity, I intend asking her to become my wife. Have you anything against it?'

Mr. Blisset pressed the young man's hand with a clasp which had grown feeble.

'You make me very happy. I would rather know her safe in your hands than in those of any other man.'

'I wish you could know it,' said Sebastian, with a somewhat melancholy smile. 'I assure you I am far from feeling confident myself, but I hope for the best.'

'I think you may be quite confident,' said Mr. Blisset. 'Poor child! now she need not be alone, and has a fair chance of a safe, untroubled future, such as a woman ought to enjoy.'

Shortly after this Sebastian left him, and went away without seeing Adrienne. Later, she went upstairs to sit with her uncle, and ask if she should read to him.

'No, thank you, my child. I shall need no more reading now, Adrienne. Your wearisome, monotonous task is almost at an end.'

'Dear uncle, what do you mean?'

'I am what men call dying, my dear. Whether it is the end of all things for each one of us, or whether it is but the beginning

of an endless succession of advancing lives, very soon I shall know—or I shall not know.'

She kissed his hand.

'You must not talk in that way. You have been very good to me, and I cannot spare you. I love you, uncle—you must not leave me.'

'I fear your pleasure will not be consulted on that point, my daughter,' said he, with a strange half-smile, half-pity, half-deep amusement. 'Ah! Adrienne, when men have lived—or existed—as I have done, and for so long, they are not sorry when the machinery comes to a stop, and they know no more.'

Much moved and much distressed, she listened to him until he sent her away, telling her to sleep undisturbedly, for he would yet live to talk with her, and convince her that it was for the best.

But he was wrong. When morning dawned, Richard Blisset was at rest, and free from the mantle of pain and weakness which he had worn so long.

CHAPTER VI.

TO THE DREGS.

THE merry month of May, in the year of grace 1862, and in that part of her Majesty's dominions known as the County Palatine of Lancaster, wore a face even less smiling and colder than usual. Despite the gaudy sunshine, despite the unusual chances offered to external nature, of showing herself to the best advantage through the absence of smoke—despite this, all was sad, penitential, silent. One missed the burst of talk and laughter, the chaffing and shouting in the streets when the mills were loosed.

One missed the tramp, tramp of the thousands of clogs over the flags, at the appointed times.

Trade had collapsed. King Cotton was discrowned; his subjects had become a nation of paupers; some of whom were begging their bread, all of whom were living chiefly on help from outside. There was a vast organisation kept up, chiefly by unpaid, voluntary toil, for discovering distress, and distributing relief. Thanshope had now added herself to the list of towns which had instituted Relief Committees, and Sebastian's schools had been merged into the larger ones belonging to the public body. They had served as a sort of model or introduction, and the others were founded upon the same plan. He himself was one of the most powerful and active members of the committee, while Adrienne and Helena, from their previous experience, were in reality the head and front of the ladies' committee, though duly subordinated in outward order to

Mrs. Ponsonby, and one or two other dames of place and importance.

But while the great complicated machine was working with such regularity and smoothness, so that it and its movements were praised by all who beheld them, what were those doing on whose behalf all this mechanism had been set a-going? What was happening in the thousands of homes whose most cherished hopes and traditions had to be given up and forsaken in this terrible emergency? In the one home in which we are interested it was going hardly enough.

It was in the very beginning of the month, a bright, glaring, sunny May morning, to look upon, with a dry, pitiless, east wind blowing round the corners and sweeping down the shady side of the streets. It was the middle of the forenoon, and the Heywoods' kitchen did not get the morning sun. There was no fire. Mary and her next-door neighbour, Mrs. Mitchell, took turns at having a fire, for the cooking in both house-

holds now was less extensive than it once had been, and each alternately undertook the responsibility of the other's baking and boiling. This was the day on which Mrs. Mitchell had the fire; consequently Mary's kitchen was all the colder from its bareness and its spotless neatness. She was sitting in the window, sewing. Myles was at the centre table, with some books from the library before him, ostensibly reading—really gazing blankly at the page, and looking, as it is not good that a young man, or any man should look—looking as men only do look when their affairs are in a very bad way.

His sister stole occasional side-glances at his face, and her heart wept, if her eyes did not. She and Edmund had been living all this time upon the weekly sum allowed by Sebastian Mallory to such of his hands as chose to accept it. They had been aided by Myles from his own store, in order that Edmund might have the things he required;

and that store, Mary knew now, was at an end, had come to an end some days ago. She did not quite know how Myles had lived during those few dreadful days. He had accepted nothing from her, because what she offered had been bought with Sebastian Mallory's money. He had smiled when she had implored him to take something and repay her when times mended, if he would not have it as a gift; smiled in a way that had not encouraged her to repeat the offer. He had made no complaints, had been very quiet, but those days had been the most wretched Mary had ever spent in her life. She knew what her brother had been trying to hold out for, but the hope continued to be deferred; and even if it must now be soon fulfilled, she feared the relief would come too late to save him from what he and she both considered the supreme and ultimate disgrace and shame of having to apply for relief. Some fortnight ago, the Relief Committee had advertised for two clerks, to relieve their

honorary secretaries of the burden of accounts and correspondence, which had grown greater than they could bear. Candidates of the artisan class were invited to apply, and it was intimated that, if competent, they would be preferred rather than others, on the principle of helping them to help themselves. Myles Heywood had been one of the applicants, and the decision would not be known for two days yet. The day before, Mary had met Mr. Mallory, and had hurriedly implored him to use his influence, if he had any, to get her brother in; but never, never to say she had asked him, or she did not know what would happen if Myles ever knew of it. He had promised; but there still remained a dreadful blank two days, and then, even with Sebastian's efforts, the answer might be that Myles was rejected.

Thus she sat this morning, with a sick heart, furtively watching her brother in an anguish of pity. Would it really come to the worst? Would he actually have to turn

his steps—her brother, of whom she was so proud—towards those dreadful doors above which glared, in white letters a foot long, 'Relief Committee's Offices?' those doors which, she thanked her God every night, she had not yet been obliged to enter? He had had no breakfast, she knew; she did not know when he had last eaten, or of what the meal had consisted. His face was terribly wasted; so was the muscular, long-fingered hand which lay before him on the table. There was lassitude in his attitude, a drawn look about his lips and his eyes; his eyes haunted her, and made her very heart bleed when she encountered them. What would he do? At eleven the committee began their sitting, and it was ten minutes to eleven now, and the offices were some distance away. If he were going, it was time he——

She started violently, as he, at this moment, pushed his books away from him with a slow, resolute sweep of his hand, and rose. What a terrible change had taken place in

the whole figure and deportment of the man!

Myles took his cap from the nail on which it hung, and turned to her,

'I'm going out, Molly,' said he.

'Yes,' she answered; and something in the muffled, toneless accent of her voice made him look at her. She was gazing intently at him, with a fixed, almost staring look—a glance of blank pain and suffering, passive, yet terrible.

'Mary,' said he, pausing. 'You know what it is. It must be. You think it is the worst; but I tell you it is not so. It is not so bad as what you would have me do.'

With that he left the room and the house.

He had a pretty long walk, up and down hill. He felt inexpressibly tired—and worse than tired; his stomach was empty; he had a sick, gnawing sense of hunger—absolute, grinding hunger, such as he had read of others—destitute people—feeling; but such as he had never before felt, till now that he

was destitute himself. His head felt weak and dizzy; his mind dull and stupid—he found he could only walk slowly, as he took first this turning and then that, and presently arrived at his destination—the one place in Thanshope where, in these hard times, a flourishing business was being carried on.

About the door was a crowd of people—men and women; young and old. The expressions upon the different faces varied from callousness, through every variety of unwillingness, pain, and shame, up to a careless hardihood that felt no disgrace, and was only wishful to make the most of the opportunity.

Into this crowd stepped the tall figure of the young workman; his face white, half with exhaustion, half with emotion; his lips set, his deep-set eyes glooming beneath the pain-drawn brows. He looked neither to right nor left of him, but, leaning against the wall, plunged his hands into his pockets and waited. There was a kind of network of

railings before the door, through which the people had to pass in single file, to prevent their all crowding in together, and Myles, like the rest, had to wait his turn.

Most men have to go through one or two *mauvais quarts d'heure* in the course of their lives, but few can have surpassed in bitterness the minutes which Myles Heywood spent, waiting his turn, before the door of the committee-room. Some one recognised him, spoke to him, and said she had never expected to see him there. He answered mechanically and composedly, but felt his face suddenly grow fierily hot; and then a little push from behind warned him to move on, and he obeyed it.

He entered the large room in company with several other people, and there were more than a dozen gentlemen seated round the table in the middle of the room. But from the moment in which he entered and saw a face raised, a pair of eyes fixed in pitying astonishment upon him, he felt as if he

were alone with one man, and that man Sebastian Mallory. Strange to say, he had never remembered, had scarcely been conscious of the fact that Mallory was one of the most important members of this very committee. He knew it now—realised it with heart and brain and consciousness, as the face of his rival

'Flashed like a cymbal on his face,'

and for a moment the sense of degradation, of humiliation, burned and scorched him, and he felt almost mad.

Almost — but no; reason was still the stronger. The remembrance of his own utter destitution, the distinct, imperative call of sickness and hunger, the clear knowledge that there was no alternative, prevailed. He did not turn round and walk away. He remained, but how he dragged his feet towards the desk of the man who was asking questions, he knew not. How he answered those questions remained also a mystery to

him. The gentleman heard him, noted his address, and said he would see that the case was inquired into. Myles felt no resentment at the idea of his statements being thought to require investigation: whether because his pride had been once for all laid low, or whether from sheer weakness and dulness of sense, he did not know. He was turning away, wondering when the inquiries would be made, and how much longer he would be able to hold out, when Sebastian Mallory, for the first time removing his attention from the writing in which he had apparently been engrossed, said composedly:

'There is no need to trouble the visitor to inquire into that case, Mr. Whitaker. I can vouch for the truth of every word of it. I should recommend you to write a ticket and pay the sum required at once.'

Then he turned to his writing again. Mr. Whitaker said:

'Ah, that is all right, then,' and immediately took a ticket and began to write.

Myles felt as if everything were reeling around him, and himself with the rest. He caught at the top of a chair by the table and steadied himself, feeling as if he were some one else, some strange, alien, degraded being —one of the beggars of whom he used to read in advanced periodicals, that they ought *not* to be relieved by private, miscellaneous almsgiving; but should all be ticketed and classified, and strictly watched and overlooked. It was as the bitterness of death, and must be borne unmoved, standing composedly and decently.

All the time he still supported himself by the back of the chair, unable, from very weakness and dizziness, to move. The gentleman who sat in it rose, and looked at him from a pair of keen, stern, steel-grey eyes.

'You look ill, young man,' said he. 'Come with me, and I will show you where to get the money.'

'He took the ticket in his hand, and,

taking Myles's arm, led him away through a side-door, into a small sort of anteroom. Here he bade Myles sit down, and he took from a cupboard some wine—red wine, which he poured into a glass and gave to Myles with a piece of bread.

'Take that,' said he, 'and drink the wine, or you will be ill before you get home. You have fasted long. You should have come sooner. How long is it since you had any food?'

'About thirty-six hours, I think,' said Myles, looking at him as he took the glass in his hand. It was Canon Ponsonby, 'the radical parson,' the man who ought to have been a prime minister, but who, as Rector of Thanshope, earned more love than falls to the lot of most prime ministers, charm they never so wisely.

His stern face softened as he looked upon the figure before him.

'You have a right spirit,' said he. 'I know your name, and who you are. Your sister attends the parish church. You——'

'Attend no church at all. I'm a free-thinker.'

'Are you? I don't think you will ever solve your riddle by free-thinking. But shake hands. I wish you were one of my flock.'

'If anything could make me one of a flock, it would be that you are the shepherd, sir,' said Myles, finishing his bread and wine, and feeling a warmer life in his veins and at his heart.

'See!' said Canon Ponsonby, 'here is the weekly allowance to which your ticket entitles you. Do not trouble to call at the office. Good-morning,' he took the young man's hand. 'I have long known of you. I am glad to have seen you. God have you in His keeping!'

Strangely moved and grateful, Myles silently clasped the noble old man's hand. He could not speak. Canon Ponsonby showed him out by a side-door, so that he avoided that dreadful crowd round the

entrance. He was in the street again, with the white ticket, and some money in his hand. After what Canon Ponsonby had said to him, he had ceased to feel that dreadful agony of shame, but he felt utterly crushed, and reduced to the most perfect insignificance.

Dreamily pursuing his homeward way, he turned over the money in his hand, and remembered that he must buy some food with it! Food! for himself? When he had gone through that age of anguish, as it had seemed to him, he should take the coins which had been so hardly earned, and buy bread with them, and eat them! It struck him as being absurd—as if one had used a steam-hammer to crush a midge withal.

Nevertheless, he went into a shop, and bought some bread and cheese, and was carrying it home, still with the same sense of incongruity between the means and the end. But, as he passed a doorstep, at the end of a

street, he beheld a little girl sitting on it, and crying bitterly.

'Little one, what's the matter?' he asked, stopping, and looking down at her.

'I'm—so—hungry!' said the child, with a sob between each word, as she looked piteously up into his face, and held a thin little pinafore, soaked with tears, in two small, tremulous hands.

'So hungry!' he said, stooping over her, with the sense that perhaps, after all, he had not gone through the furnace to find nothing at the other side. 'Hast had no breakfast?'

'Nay, none at o'.'

'How's that?'

Here a thin, clean-looking, poorly-clad woman, with a baby in her arms, came to the door.

'Come in, Sarah Emily,' said she. 'For shame o' thisel, to sit bawlin' on th' dur-step. Thi' feyther's gone to see about summat to ayt. Coom in, and hold thi' din.'

'I'm—so—hungry!' was the only answer.

'Ne'er heed her, lad!' said the woman to Myles. 'My measter's gone to th' committee to-day. We've had to come to that, and we'll likely get summat to ayt afore neet.'

'Nay, but it's very hard for such a bit of a lass to wait so long,' said Myles. 'If you'll trust her to me, I'll give her some breakfast. I'm just going to get my own.'

'Eh, thank you, you're very kind,' said the woman, her voice suddenly breaking, as she looked at him, and then turned aside again.

'Come, my lass!' said Myles gently, and he took the open-mouthed Sarah Emily in his arms, and carried her to his home.

In the kitchen, he seated her in Mary's rocking-chair, explaining briefly to his sister that the child was clemming, and must be fed, and then he cut her some bread and cheese, and watched her with an intense and altogether unaccountable interest while she

ate it. He felt almost light-hearted. If he had not, so to speak, walked up to the cannon's mouth this morning, little Sarah Emily might have been sickening with hunger until eventide.

'Good! good!' she cried, when she had eaten as much as she could.

And she laughed at him, while he slowly ate something himself.

'Look here!' he suggested; 'do you think you could find your way from your home to this another day?'

'Eh, ay! It's none so far,' said Sarah Emily.

'Then, if you come every morning—every morning, mind—I'll give you something to eat always, eh?' he suggested.

'But I can ayt such a lot, when I'm hungry,' said Sarah Emily bashfully, putting hor forefinger into her mouth.

'Never mind! There'll always be something. Wilt come?'

'Eh, I will so!' said the child, clapping

her hands, jumping upon his knee, and kissing him.

Thus was the bargain struck.

There is at this day in Thanshope a dark-eyed young woman, of some twenty-four years, who has a husband, and some young children. When the little ones clamour for breakfast or dinner, she is in the habit of reproving them, by telling them that they don't know what real hunger is; and, as an instance in point, she is given to relating the story how she sat on the doorstep one day in the 'panic,' crying with hunger, and how the tall, pale-faced young man with the kind eyes picked her up, and carried her home, and gave her food; and how either he or his sister welcomed their hungry little visitor daily for——

'How long, mother?

'Three months, child; every day—eh, they were kind; they were so.'

'Is he alive now, mother?'

'Ay, for sure he is, and——'

But the dark-eyed young woman always makes rather a long story of it, and freely intersperses remarks and comments, which, though doubtless interesting to her family, might not be considered of value by the public in general.

Two days later, the postman brought Myles a summons to attend at the Central Offices of the Relief Committee that day, as he was one of the successful candidates for the clerkship, and that his salary would be twenty shillings a week.

Thus the worst, materially, was tided over; but the bitterness of the cup he had drunk that terrible morning, did not lightly pass away.

CHAPTER VII.

A PAUSE.

WHEN Myles began his work at the Committee Office, one conspicuous member of the Ladies' Committee was temporarily absent. Adrienne Blisset was then occupied in learning the condition of her own affairs, and found herself soon in a totally different position from any she had ever expected to fill—very rich, as it seemed to her, and a person of great importance; and, what was strangest of all, with Sebastian Mallory coming and going, fulfilling his duties as executor, and explaining everything to her. She repeatedly told

him that she could not believe it; it was impossible—there must be a mistake. All that money hers, to do as she liked with, and she had not earned it, nor worked for it!

'What an idea you have of working for everything you get!' he exclaimed suddenly one day. 'Do you carry it so far as to demand a service from every one to whom you accord a sign of favour?'

'Really I don't know what you mean,' replied she. 'I only know that I have got, you tell me, between six and seven hundred a year, and I have done nothing to deserve it.'

'No. I suppose you have to deserve it now, by using it properly,' said he sedately.

That was in fact the amount of Adrienne's means, and it was natural that it should appear to her as wealth unbounded. She had also Stonegate on a lease, which had yet somewhat over two years to run. And when she had learnt all this, and that she really was the mistress of such means, with the

only drawback that there was no one to share them with, no one to consult with—herself alone, and her own pleasure and convenience to study; when she had grasped these facts, and had begun to feel rather sad and lonely, she returned to her work one morning in a black dress, looking rather thinner and paler than she had done before. The people with whom she had become acquainted in her work, and who had heard the reason of her absence, came round her, and, though not openly, congratulated her, hoped she would now take a recognised place amongst them, asked if they might call, and so on. And as she somewhat vaguely and sadly answered these efforts at friendship, she looked up, and saw some one pass the window. It was Myles Heywood, going to his work.

Adrienne's name had become well-known in Thanshope during the last three months. It was but a provincial town, and every one seemed thoroughly acquainted with every

one else's affairs. Mrs. Mallory had been much annoyed at finding Sebastian 'mixed up,' as she called it, with Mr. Blisset's affairs, and above all, with those of Miss Blisset. She had had to explain it as well as she could to certain friends who had asked her who this Miss Blisset was, and what it all meant.

Sebastian, she said, was so very good-natured; she feared he would be imposed upon sometime. Did she know Miss Blisset? Certainly she did, in a way; but as for being a friend of hers, certainly not! Sebastian had consented to act as Mr. Blisset's executor out of pure goodwill and kindness, because the man was so much to be pitied, and seemed to have absolutely no friends. That was all.

But despite all Mrs. Mallory's efforts, it got known that her son and the young lady who had lately come into a fortune, and who was reported to be both charming and accomplished, were very great friends. Helena

Spenceley took rather a malicious pleasure in upholding this theory in Mrs. Mallory's very presence, so that that lady would have boxed her ears with pleasure, if one could box the ears of a person who would have one hundred thousand pounds some day.

Thus Miss Blisset and Mr. Mallory were already talked about in a certain set, and Adrienne's duties had made her name and herself familiar to another and a less distinguished public—to the working-people of Thanshope. She had been a notability amongst them before her sudden accession to wealth and friends; she was doubly well-known to them now. She was busy and pre-occupied, thought Myles, as he sat at his desk in the second office, and saw her almost daily pass the windows on her way to the Ladies' Committee-room. She was a lady of property, sought after and busy, and he was a clerk on a high stool, to whom she scarce spoke a word from one week's end to another.

Those years of distress brought about some strange acquaintances, and led to some unusual events. Though everything appeared on the outside to work so smoothly, there were active emotions stirring amongst the members of that Thanshope Relief Committee—emotions quite unconnected with the wants of those for whose benefit they had assembled themselves. The circumstances were exceptional, and it was only under exceptional circumstances that those particular people could have not only met, but continued almost daily to meet and come in contact with one another. Gradually circumstances drew them together — gradually as they met, the half-forgotten smouldering feelings of love and hate, contempt and pity, sprang into life and activity again, and emotion stepped to the front, and all these things acted and reacted one upon the other, till every story was modified, every life received a bend this way or that, a change in the even tenor of its way.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MEETING.

MR. SPENCELEY, the millionaire, the richest man in Thanshope, the man of boundless wealth and boundless callousness, was amongst those cotton lords, who, to their lasting shame and disgrace, were determined at this crisis not to come forward and give of their abundance, but who preferred to hang back until the popular voice left them no option, and the universal indignation absolutely thrust them to the front.

For a long time Mr. Spenceley had contented himself with abusing the sorely tried work-people, demanding to know why they

did not all emigrate, and vowing that he would not waste his money upon them. He amused himself by everywhere calling Sebastian Mallory, behind his back, a fool and a madman, a spendthrift, a pernicious leveller, and so on; and by behaving to him before his face with the utmost courtesy and politeness, excusing conduct which might savour of double-dealing, by saying that such fools could never be made to see that they were fools, and that it was best to take them as you found them, and let them go their own way.

When the Public Relief Committee was established, and one and all, rich and poor, young and old, contributed something, either in money, or kind, or assistance, or all, the chief inhabitant of Thanshope could no longer hold back. He allowed his name to appear as a member of the committee, sent a subscription of a hundred pounds, and deputed his son to act as his proxy at councils, committee meetings, and so on. Despite the bad

times, he himself was so much engaged with business, that he had no time to attend to such things.

Accordingly, Fred Spenceley periodically shed the light of his countenance upon the council board and those surrounding it. He continued to come, despite a terrible rebuff he received on the occasion of his first appearance upon the scene.

It was that rebuff, and one or two incidents connected with it, which filled him with rage and bitterness; so that if he had been an Irish reaper, or an Oldham weaver, he would have proceeded to drink himself blind, and then gone home and maltreated his wife, or any other feminine creature within the range of his arm. Being in a different station from that occupied by reapers and weavers, and thinly veneered over into a poor, tinselly, outward semblance of a gentleman, he only raged frantically within himself, and cast about to find an instrument to execute a moral revenge, which, he had sense

enough in his dull, brutal brain to know, would far more torture the objects of it than all the corporal punishment in the world.

He arrived one afternoon, thinking the whole business a great piece of 'tomfoolery.' The Relief Committee's offices consisted of three rooms, opening one out of the other. The first was the Ladies Committee-room, a large, spacious place, where the ladies could meet, decide upon their proceedings, and hear the accounts of their wants and troubles brought to them by mothers, wives, and daughters from all parts of the town. Passing through this room, a second and smaller one was reached, in which sat the two clerks, Myles Heywood, and a lad who was under him. Through this second apartment, ingress was obtained to the Gentlemen's Committee-room, where the council assembled, three times a week as a rule, and oftener if necessary.

Coming to attend his first committee meeting, Fred Spenceley entered the first of these

rooms, and, glancing round, beheld different groups scattered in different parts of the room. No one took any notice of him; they were all much too busy; but as he looked round, he perceived, in one of the windows apart from the rest, three persons: Sebastian Mallory, whom he had hated since first he saw his face, as only a true 'cad' can hate a true gentleman; and two ladies—one in black, whose back was turned towards him, the other his sister Helena, erect, animated, with her dark eyes flashing and her silks in some agitation.

He walked up to the group, and touched Helena on the shoulder, inquiring graciously,

'Well, little one, what's the matter now?'

'Fred! How you startled me! Have you come to the meeting?'

'Yes, I have. Much good it will do me or any one else, my being here. But the governor was——'

'Oh, yes! I know. But stop! You know Mr. Mallory. Miss Blisset, let me——'

Adrienne interrupted her. She was standing, pale, haughty, and erect, with eyes full of cold contempt; and she interposed, in a cool, decided voice:

'Pardon me, Miss Spenceley, I do not wish for any introduction. I must decline to make that—gentleman's acquaintance.'

With which she turned away, in perfect outward composure, and seating herself at a desk, calmly looked out of the window, leaving Sebastian surprised, and yet not surprised, Fred furious, and Helena overwhelmed with confusion; for she knew her brother, and felt sure that he must have distinguished himself in some far from desirable manner towards Miss Blisset, to cause that gentle lady openly to manifest discourtesy. Helena's humiliation was increased as she realised, with lightning-like rapidity, that Adrienne must have some excellent reason for repeatedly refusing to visit her at Castle Hill. Crimson, she stood where she had received the rebuff, and knew not what to do. It was Sebastian who, after

the unavoidable momentary pause, and when Mr. Spenceley had turned upon his heel, said, just as if nothing had happened:

'I shall lay the matter before the Board to-day, Miss Spenceley, and I am sure it will be attended to immediately.'

Helena met his eyes as she looked up at him, and the burning blush of mortification glowed more deeply than before.

'You are very kind,' said she, in a low, choked voice; 'but you cannot do away with the fact that I have to blush for my nearest relations.'

With that, she too turned away, as if not knowing where to go to; and Sebastian decided that the best thing he could do would be to follow Mr. Spenceley to the council-room.

For Mr. Spenceley, muttering an anathema, had directed his steps away from such dangerous ground, and with raging hatred in his heart, entered the second of the three rooms. In that moment he would gladly have

strangled some one, or kicked his dog, or flogged his horse, or sworn at his mother; and if he had had a wife, he would have caused her to spend a joyful evening on his return home.

As it was, he found himself in a small room, in the window of which stood a long desk, at which desk sat two men busily writing. One of them rose, as he entered, to fetch a ledger from a shelf at the other side of the room. Spenceley's rage gave way to a momentary start of surprise; then the blood came surging to his face and ears, as he found that he was confronting that insolent, unknown operative who had disgraced and branded him, and degraded and punished him ten months ago in the club billiard-room.

Like a lurid dream it all started up again in his brain. There the man stood—he tingled from head to foot as he beheld him—with face pinched and worn, but with that same broad, unstained brow, the same scorn-

ful grey eyes, the same muscular fingers—he seemed to feel them at his collar again—and he could not grind him to powder, as he would like to do, nor put him to any kind of horrible torture, such as he would have deemed desirable for him. Myles's eyes fell upon him, and a sudden gleam of scornful, contemptuous amusement shot into them; his head flung itself backwards—his lips curved into a kind of smile, but otherwise he did not deign to notice Mr. Spenceley.

Into the heart of the latter the old devils of revengeful desire and frantic hatred came leaping back. Why had he been so quiet? Why had he suffered himself to be laughed at and diverted from his original purpose of punishment? Why had he sat down patiently all this time with that—a black cloud of fury overshadowed his mind. His thoughts were scarcely coherent. But it was incredible. The fellow should and must be made to pay dearly for his insolence.

He had sworn it once, and he would carry it out now. With wrath and rage contending madly in his stupid, brutal soul, he went on into the committee-room, where he was immediately followed by Sebastian Mallory, and business commenced.

Fred Spenceley was too much occupied with his own private fury, with thinking, with a sort of hatred and love combined, of the sweet, contemptuous face of Adrienne Blisset, which he could not banish from his mind—of these and of other things, to take any particular notice of the man called James Hoyle, who was summoned to read a report to the Board that afternoon.

He had been intrusted with the task of visiting certain courts in a low part of the town, whither, it was said, a number of the factory hands had been obliged to retire, in consequence of being unable any longer to pay the rent of more respectable houses. Mr. Hoyle had offered himself to the Board as peculiarly suited for the work, being him-

self a minister of the gospel, and used to strange scenes and low neighbourhoods.

'He speaks the truth there, at all events,' Sebastian Mallory had remarked, *sotto voce*, to Canon Ponsonby, 'but the Father of Lies has had some share in his parentage, all the same, sir—don't you think so?'

'Or else he has selected him as his peculiar adversary, and left the traces of his attempts to corrupt him,' replied Canon Ponsonby, fixing his piercing eyes upon Mr. Hoyle.

But as Mr. Hoyle really did seem well-fitted and anxious for the work, he was allowed to undertake it.

His report was considered clear and succinct. He was told that he had done well; a further commission of the same kind was given him, and he was told to present himself again as soon as possible with the required information.

Expressing himself humbly gratified at having been of any service in such a cause,

Mr. Hoyle bowed to the assembled Board carefully avoiding two pairs of eyes—a pair of lazy brown ones and a pair of piercing grey ones, and, with a long sidelong look at the sullen, averted countenance of Frederick Spenceley, took his departure.

A fortnight passed. The middle of May had come and gone. Every day the distress grew more tremendous—the efforts needed to meet it more strenuous and unceasing. The whole time and the whole energies of those who had begun the work were gradually absorbed into it. Still the cruel war raged on across the Atlantic, and Midsummer and Famine advanced hand in hand, with long, devouring strides.

CHAPTER IX.

'FOR A PRICE.'

A COMMITTEE-MEETING had been called for a certain Tuesday afternoon. An appeal for help had been sent out to all the persons of any position in the neighbourhood. Canon Ponsonby's name headed the list with a donation of fifty pounds, which was more to him than fifty hundred would have been to Mr. Spenceley. Some half-dozen large manufacturing firms followed with sums varying from one to five hundred pounds. 'S. M., five hundred pounds.' 'Mrs. Mallory, five pounds.' Mrs. Mallory had so many calls

upon her charity just then, she said, she really could not afford more, or the yearly sum she set apart for such purposes would be exceeded.

'The yearly distress to be relieved is also considerably exceeded,' murmured her son as he took possession of the contribution. 'H. v. B., five pounds.'

'Our money!' as Mrs. Mallory indignantly observed to herself, and tossed her head angrily.

'H. S., ten pounds.' This stood for Helena Spenceley, who delivered the money over to Sebastian with a kind of chuckle. 'You would never guess how I got it,' said she, with a broad smile of triumph and satisfaction.

'Begged, borrowed, or stolen?' he asked, smiling too.

'Neither one nor the other. Nor yet was it a free gift, nor yet did I find it at the back of a drawer, having quite forgotten that I had put it there, as I once before did

with a five-pound note. Oh, you will never know how I got it.' And she laughed.

But Sebastian learnt from Adrienne how she had come by the money.

'Her father would not give her a penny,' said she, 'because he had made up his mind with his narrow income to sacrifice twenty-five pounds, which he was sadly in need of himself, so what do you think she did?'

'Such knowledge is too wonderful for me.'

'She sold a lot of her dresses and things. I expect the poor girl has been awfully cheated,' Adrienne added, a touch of real feminine feeling and regret in her tone. 'She said she had left herself only half a dozen—and fancy getting no more than ten pounds for the rest of her wardrobe—it is awful to think of. But the money was there, she said, and she could not resist it. She is as pleased as if it had been a hundred.'

'Like somebody else's,' suggested Sebastian.

'Somebody else's?'

He pointed to the written subscription-list which they had been looking over. 'Life let us Cherish, £100,' stood inscribed on the page.

'Do you think I don't know what hand traced that?'

'But you won't tell, please!' said Adrienne.

'Ah, you have confessed. No; I will not tell, unless I think it would be for your good.'

'Nonsense! But was it not nice and generous in that girl?' persisted Adrienne, who always would talk to Sebastian much more than he liked about Helena.

'Yes; it was. But she has a generous disposition,' he admitted, still looking affectionately at his favourite inscription.

The celebrated twenty-five pounds spoken of by Adrienne—it is lucky that money has not an organised nervous system, or it might suffer keenly under the touch of some fingers!—was committed by Mr. Spenceley

the elder to Mr. Spenceley the younger, with the remark that he wondered how much longer people who had honestly earned their money would be expected to pour it out like water, 'in that way;' and the request that he would deliver it into the hands of Sebastian Mallory, the treasurer.

Mr. Frederick Spenceley, who did not appear to find business so engrossing as his father, strolled down to the committee-rooms, arriving on the scene of action some ten minutes or quarter of an hour before any signs of action had begun to manifest themselves. The well-known *mauvais quart d'heure* may be evil in many ways, kinds, and degrees of badness. Frederick Spenceley had no intention of spending his fifteen minutes more aimlessly or mischievously than usual; but his guardian demon had ordained that they should be consumed more reprehensibly, perhaps, than all the rest of his existence put together.

There was no one in the first room, no one

in the second room; in the third room was a solitary figure standing in one of the windows—a figure in black cloth clothes, with a bundle of documents under one arm—the figure of Mr. James Hoyle.

There were two windows to the room. Mr. Spenceley, jingling the coin in his pockets, strolled up to the other one, and stood at it, whistling to himself, and looking out upon the prospect—what there was of it. The two windows were on the same side of the room, and looked upon a kind of open yard, separated from the street by a low wall. It was a slanting street, like so many others in that up and down town, Thanshope. Exactly opposite the window in which Spenceley stood was a gate, through which any one coming to the committee-rooms must pass, and going under the windows (to the right) of the other two rooms, at last arrive at the door opening into the Ladies' Committee-room. There was also a separate door, leading into the second room, or clerk's

office, where Myles Heywood and his fellow-clerk sat.

Half absently, Spenceley began to collect the money together that his father had given him, and to lay it out, two five-pound notes and fifteen sovereigns, upon the window-ledge before him. He looked at it pensively, and Mr. Hoyle's little sharp eyes were fixed with a sidelong gaze, full of interest, upon his face. Mr. Hoyle had surveyed the prospect to more purpose than Mr. Spenceley, and was very anxious that the latter should give over counting out his money, and return to the apparently innocent pursuit of looking out of the window, which he presently did.

He plunged his hands into his pockets, and gazed out again, swaying to and fro from his toes to his heels, in the rhythmic manner common to persons in his position. Presently the rhythmic movement ceased. Mr. Spenceley's attention became concentrated on outside objects, on a figure some two hundred yards distant, approaching down the hill.

He looked at her as she came along, in her black dress, with her pale face and her warmly-tinted hair. He hated her for a thousand reasons, and because she looked sad and lovely at once; because she was gentle to others, and to him an icicle; and, most of all, because he had made a great mistake about her in his gross, clumsy, blundering way, and knew now, that if he had but known what she was, he would never have insulted her, but would have tried with all his might, though he was not clever, to become good enough for her. But she had prevented that, she had refused him the faintest chance of letting her know that he repented, and by ——, he thought, savagely, he did not repent. These women were all alike; either worse than the devil himself, or too icily cold and pure to glance aside at such as he. He watched and watched, as if fascinated; watched how she came along, looking tired and pale, but lovely; despite his hatred he felt with all the finer feeling he had, that she

was lovely, and his head turned, his eyes followed her steps, till she arrived at the gate, and then her face changed, and he gave a great start, for, standing there, exactly as she came up, was Myles Heywood, who had been coming (as the astute Mr. Hoyle had perceived) up the hill from the opposite direction.

They met at the gate. Adrienne's face, after a faint smile, seemed to grow still paler and calmer. She held out her hand. Myles took off his cap, and though he did not smile—unless a slight quiver about the corners of his mouth could be called a smile—yet he took her hand, and they spoke together for a moment at the gate. It was quite evident that it was Adrienne, and not Myles, who made the pause and carried on the conversation which took place before they both came on, past the windows (which had the lower panes frosted, on purpose to baffle vulgar curiosity), without seeing the two striking countenances that were watching them.

Myles left Adrienne at the door of the second room, and she went on to the ladies' room.

Frederick Spenceley had entirely forgotten the presence in the room of any one but himself. He gave vent to his feelings in a low, but distinctly audible,

'Damn them!'

He suddenly felt a touch on his arm, and, turning round, with his usual disproportionate start, beheld Mr. Hoyle at his elbow, looking into his face.

'Oh! Confound you! What do you want, creeping up to a fellow in that way?'

'I beg your pardon, sir. I have been looking at that man, Myles Heywood . . . '

'What, that's the blackguard's name, is it?'

'Yes, sir. My step-son. A—*some* young ladies choose strange friends, sir; don't you think so?'

Spenceley was about to ask roughly what business of his it was; but something in the

intent, glittering fixity of the man's gaze held him fast.

'Perhaps they do,' said he slowly. 'What then?'

'Only this. That young man's mother is now my wife. I ought to know what sort of a character he is. I ought to know something about the young lady, too. If the facts about both of them, the real facts, were known, *she* would be in a different position from what she has, and he——'

Mr. Hoyle laughed.

'He — what about him?' asked Mr. Spenceley, almost breathlessly.

'Well, I don't think that young fool of a master of his——

'Who is his master?'

'Mallory.'

'Ah—h!'

'He's taken a fancy to him; he's offered to help him. He did help him to his present place. But it was in ignorance of the facts. If he knew the facts, my young

gentleman would not be in such a hurry to patronise him. In fact—he'd be ruined.'

'Facts—what facts?"

'Ah!' said Mr. Hoyle. 'That's just it. Properly to investigate and establish those facts might be rather expensive.'

'Oh! you are certain that if they were known they would have the requisite effect?'

'You mean——'

'Of parting him and her—of punishing her.'

'I tell you, he would leave the place, and she would cry her eyes out. I know it.'

'And about how expensive would that be?' demanded Spenceley.

'It would cost a hundred pounds, and I should want five-and-twenty to go on with—the rest down when I tell you he has gone.'

Spenceley put his hand on the money.

'This is five-and-twenty,' he remarked. 'I must give them a cheque for it instead of money down. But remember, if you're cheating me——'

'On my soul and honour, sir,' said Hoyle, with almost vehement earnestness, 'you may trust me. It's as much my cause as yours. And meantime, if you should hear any reports to the disadvantage of a certain lady, don't deny them—I told you I knew some queer facts about them both.'

Scarcely had the money been transferred to the keeping of Mr. Hoyle, than the door was opened, and Canon Ponsonby, Sebastian Mallory, and others, came in. Mr. Hoyle began to study his documents, and Fred Spenceley to look out of the window again, his heart beating unheroically fast, with a sense of peril of which he felt ashamed, and an undercurrent of eager thirst for revenge, the stronger in that there was now some prospect of its being gratified.

END OF VOL. II.

BILLING AND SONS, PRINTERS, GUILDFORD, SURREY.
J. D. & Co.

00077519

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 18 July, 2018